FILM
QUARTERLY

INDEX TO VOLUME XXIX

Titles of films and books reviewed appear in *italics*. First reference number indicates volume number; second indicates issue number; third indicates page. Major topics are also indexed.

Against "The System of the Suture." 29:1:45
Akenfield. 29:1:43
Alea, Tomas Guiterrez. 29:2:45
Altman, Robert. 29:2:13
Amarcord. 29:1:50
Attica. 29:1:39
Atwell, Lee. *Le Cousin Jules.* 29:2:57
Bachmann, Gideon. Confessions of a Festival Goer. 29:4:14
———. *Conversation Piece.* 29:2:55
———. Films Are Animal Events: Bertolucci Talks About His New Film, *1900.* 29:1:11
———. Pasolini on de Sade. 29:2:39
Baillie, Bruce. 29:3:14,22
Barr, William R. Brakhage: Artistic Development in Two Childbirth Films. 29:3:30
Bartholomew, David. *Night Moves.* 29:2:52
Baskin, Richard (interview). 29:2:19
Bed, The. 29:4:8
Benechetti, Dominique. 29:2:57
Bertolucci, Bernardo (interview). 29:1:11
Biskind, Peter. The Politics of Power in *On the Waterfront.* 29:1:25
Black Caesar. 29:1:6
Black Dreams. 29:1:2
Bonnie Consolo. 29:2:60
Born to Kill. 29:1:20
Brakhage, Stan. 29:3:30
Broughton, James. 29:4:2
Brother, Can You Spare a Dime? 29:1:43
Browne, Nick. The Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of *Stagecoach.* 29:2:26
Burton, Julianne. *The Promised Land.* 29:1:57
Byrne, Connie, and William O. Lopez. *Nashville.* 29:2:13
Callenbach, Ernest. *Crossroads.* 29:4:57
———. Television "Versions." 29:2:1
———. Two Films by Barry Spinello. 29:2:60
Cassavetes, John. 29:2:4
Castro Street: The Sensibility of Style. 29:3:14
Celebration: Four Films by James Broughton. 29:4:2
Chambers, Jack. 29:4:54
"Classical" film style, in *Stagecoach.* 29:2:26
Cockfighter. 29:1:20
Cohen, Robert. *A Page of Madness.* 29:4:47
Collins, Vincent. 29:3:40
Commercials, television. 29:2:1
Confessions of a Festival Goer. 29:4:14
Conner, Bruce. 29:4:57
Conrad, Randall. *Diane.* 29:4:58
Conversation Piece. 29:2:55
Coursen, David, John Ford: Assessing the Reassessment. 29:3:58
Cousin Jules, Le. 29:2:57
Crossroads. 29:4:57
Cuban Cinema: Tomas Guiterrez Alea. 29:2:45
Cuban Fight Against the Demons, The. 29:2:50
Cubist Cinema, The. 29:4:27
Dayan, David. 29:1:45
Death of a Bureaucrat. 29:2:48
Degener, David. Director Under the Influence. 29:2:4
Dempsey, Michael. Rebuttal to reply by D. Coursen. 29:3:60
———. *Taxi Driver.* 29:4:37
de Sade, and *120 Days of Sodom.* 29:2:39
Diane. 29:4:58
Director Under the Influence. 29:2:4
Dreamwood. 29:4:10
Early Griffith: A Wider View. 29:3:2
Education of Sonny Carson, The. 29:1:9
Euphoria. 29:3:40
F for Fake. 29:4:42
Feldman, Seth. *The Hart of London.* 29:4:54
Film About Sharon, A. 29:2:60
Film Books: Another Last Round-Up at the FQ Corral. 29:4:25
Film festivals. 29:4:14
Film theory. 29:2:2
Films Are Animal Events (Bertolucci interview). 29:1:11
Fischer, Lucy. *Castro Street:* The Sensibility of Style. 29:3:14
Ford, John. 29:3:58
From *Cockfighter* to *Born to Kill.* 29:1:20
From Militant Cinema to Neorealism: The Example of *Pueblo Chico.* 29:4:17
General Idi Imin Dada. 29:1:40
Griffith, D. W. 29:3:2
Hart of London, The. 29:4:54
Hirsch, Foster. *Amarcord.* 29:1:50
Histoire d'Adele H., L'. 29:3:43
Hit Man. 29:1:6
Hyman, Timothy. *Solaris.* 29:3:54
Introduction to the Enemy. 29:1:42
Italy: Year One. 29:1:42
John Ford: Assessing the Reassessment. 29:3:58
John Ford. 29:4:29
Johnson, William. Early Griffith: A Wider View. 29:3:2
———. *F for Fake.* 29:4:42
Kay, Karyn. *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave.* 29:1:52
———. Reply to L. Poague. 29:4:63
Kazan, Elia. 29:1:25
Keel, Erich. From Militant Cinema to Neorealism: The Example of *Pueblo Chico.* 29:4:17
Kernan, Margot. Cuban Cinema: Tomas Guiterrez Alea. 29:2:45
Kinugasa, Teinosuke. 29:4:47
Klein, Gillian Parker. *L'Histoire d'Adele H.* 29:3:43
Kluge, Alexander. 29:1:52
Kovacs, Steven. Kuleshov's Aesthetics. 29:3:34
Kuleshov's Aesthetics. 29:3:34

Last Grave at Dimbaza. 29:1:41
Latin American Cinema: Film and History. 29:4:26
Littin, Miguel. 29:1:57
Lopez, William O., and Connie Byrne. *Nashville.* 29:2:13
Makavejev, Dusan. 29:4:53
Memories of Underdevelopment. 29:2:45
Mother's Day. 29:4:4
Movie-Made America. 29:4:25
Mythology, of black films. 29:1:2
Nashville (An Interview "Documentary"). 29:2:13
Neorealism. 29:4:17
New Documentaries at Filmex. 29:1:38
Night Moves. 29:2:52
1900. 29:1:11
Non-narrative forms. 29:3:15
On screwball Comedy and Mrs. Noah. 29:4:62
On the Waterfront. 29:1:25
Page of Madness, A. 29:4:47
Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave. 29:1:52
Pasolini on de Sade. 29:2:39
Peasants of the Second Fortress, The. 29:1:62
Penn, Arthur. 29:2:52
Phillips, Marcus. Riefenstahl's "Harassment." 29:3:62
Pleasure Garden, The. 29:4:6
Poague, Lee vs. Kay, Karyn, 29:4:62
Politics of Power in *On the Waterfront,* The. 29:1:25
Porter, Carolyn, and Paul Thomas. *Swept Away. . . .* 29:3:49
Promised Land, The. 29:1:57
Pueblo Chico. 29:4:17
Reveaux, Anthony. *Euphoria.* 29:3:40
———. *Cubist Cinema, The.* 29:4:27
Riefenstahl's "Harrassment." 29:3:62
Rothman, William. Against "The System of the Suture." 29:1:45
Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom. 29:2:39
Scorsese, Martin. 29:4:37
Screwball comedy. 29:1:55, 29:4:62
Sheehy, Terry. Celebration: Four Films by James Broughton. 29:4:2
Solaris. 29:3:54
Spectator-in-the-Text, The: The Rhetoric of *Stagecoach.* 29:2:26
Stagecoach, analysis of scene from. 29:2:26
Stoil, Michael Jon. *A Village Production of Hamlet.* 29:4:51
Structure of Lyric, The: Baillie's *To Parsifal.* 29:3:22
Superfly. 29:1:4
Sweet Sweetback's Baadass Song. 29:1:7
Swept Away... . 29:3:49
"System of the Suture," The. 29:1:45
Tarkovsky, Andrei. 29:3:54
Taxi Driver. 29:4:37
Television "Versions." 29:2:1
Tewksbury, Joan (interview). 29:2:18
Thomas, Paul, and Carolyn Porter. *Swept Away.... .* 29:3:49
Truffaut, Francois. 29:3:43
Tuchman, Mitch. New Documentaries at Filmex. 29:1:38
Two Films by Barry Spinello. 29:2:60

Ukamau group. 29:4:17
Van Peebles, Melvin. 29:1:3
Village Production of Hamlet, A. 29:5:51
Visconti, Luchino. 29:2:55
Visionary Film. 29:1:1
Viva Zapata! 29:1:27
Vocation, The. 29:1:40

Wander, Brandon. Black Dreams. 29:1:2
Weiner, Bernard. *The Peasants of the Second Fortress.* 29:1:62
Welles, Orson. 29:4:42
Wertmüller, Lina. 29:3:49
Wild and the Brave, The. 29:1:41
Willeford, Charles. From *Cockfighter* to *Born to Kill.* 29:1:20
Williams, Alan. The Structure of Lyric: Baillie's *To Parsifal.* 29:3:22
Woman Under the Influence, A. 29:2:4

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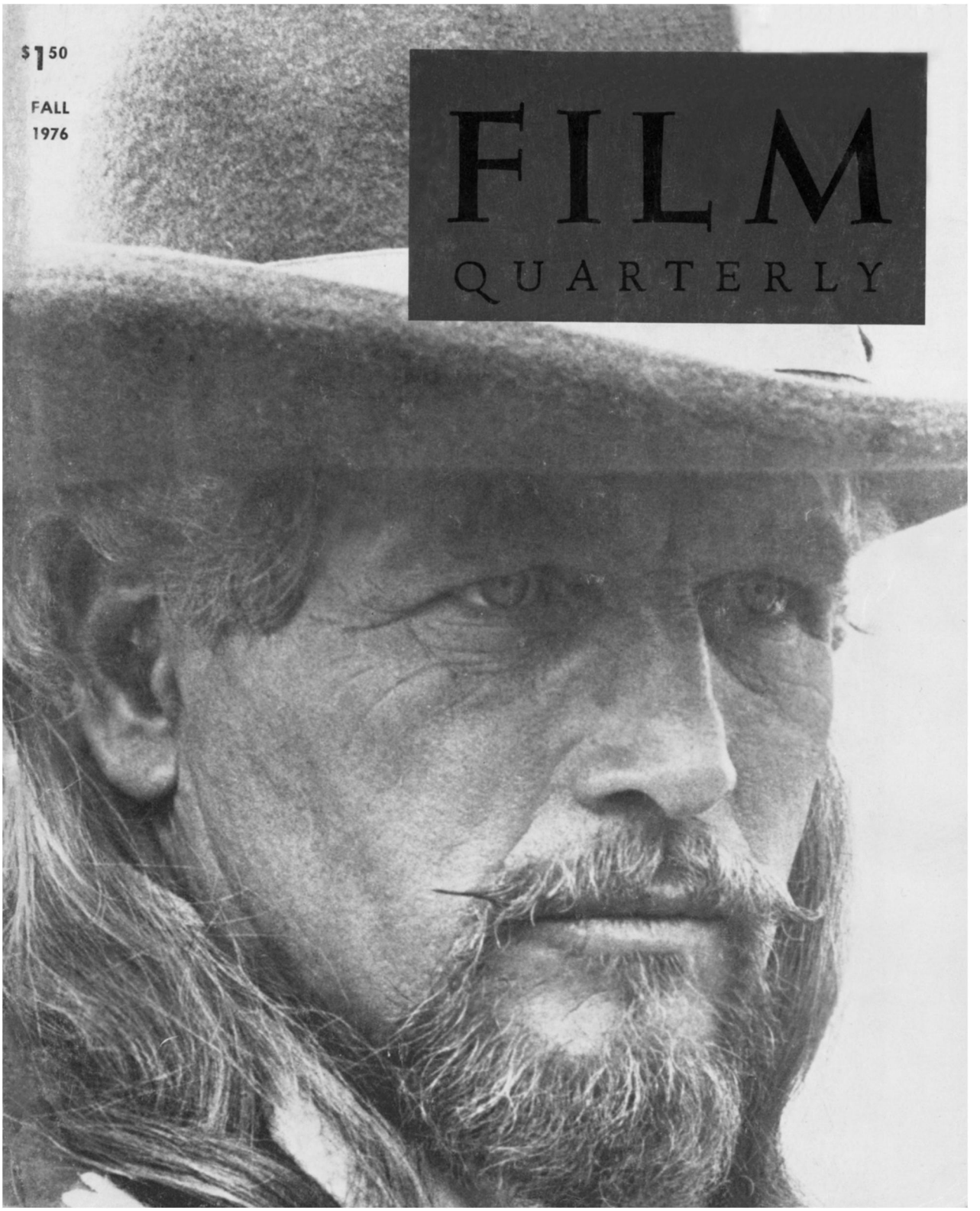
1976

FILM QUARTERLY



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VOL. XXX, No. 1 Fall 1976

Editor's Notebook

ARTICLES

The Image of Woman as Image: The Optical Politics of *Dames* — LUCY FISCHER 2

Kubrick and His Discontents — HANS FELDMANN 12

Film Style and Technology in the Thirties — BARRY SALT 19

The Hour of the Embers: On the Current Situation of Latin American Cinema — JULIANNE BURTON 33

REVIEWS

The Magic Flute — WILLIAM MORITZ 45

Barry Lyndon — MICHAEL DEMPSEY 49

Buffalo Bill and the Indians — KAREN STABINER 54

The Traitors — JULIANNE BURTON 57

The Man from Maisinicú — MITCH TUCHMAN 59

Diaries, Notes and Sketches (Vol. I, "Lost, Lost, Lost) — ALAN WILLIAMS 60

The Devil's Cleavage — CHUCK KLEINHANS 62

COVER: Paul Newman in Robert Altman's *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or, Sitting Bull's History Lesson.*

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We also continue our emphasis on theoretical articles; the following issue will contain a major article on the relations (or rather non-relations) between traditional film theory and non-narrative forms. Contributions are invited in all these areas.

CONTRIBUTORS

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(*continued on page 10*)

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the first such shot, girls run up to the camera and obscure the lens with the fabric of their nightgowns. Then in a masked cut (with attendant change of décor) the fabric is removed to reveal a girl in a bath tub. The girl proceeds to cover the lens with a powder puff which (through another masked cut) is removed by a girl at a dressing table. Eventually the girl takes a bottle of perfume and sprays the surface of the lens. We next see the lens wiped clean, but this time our vision is identified with a particular male stagehand and the lens has become a window through which he watches the show girls approach.

This dialectic of seeing and being prevented from seeing is epitomized in the number's final voyeuristic character, a "blind" man who sheepishly removes his dark glasses to stare at the show girls who pass on the street. (We should remember that as English lengend has it Peeping Tom was, in fact, a Coventry tailor who went blind after peering at Lady Godiva.)

Although Berkeley plays on the notion of camera as voyeuristic tool, he nonetheless conceals its presence. While mirrors figure dominantly in the imagery of the numbers (the "mirror" of women in "I Only Have Eyes for You," and the dressing-table "mirrors" in "Dames") they are most often false surfaces which refuse to reflect an image of the camera or of the man who stands behind it.

But the iconography of the Berkeley numbers seem to go beyond engaging the female screen persona as source of mere voyeuristic pleasure. For in addition to the numbers whose effect depends on the prescence of *actual* women one is struck by the existence of sequences content with their photographic image.

We might recall, for example, that on the subway in "I Only Have Eyes for You" Dick Powell conspicuously ignores the corporeal reality of Ruby Keeler to embark on a fantasy digression based on her photographic likeness. But the issue seems crystallized in the final sequence of "Dames." What we see on the screen is a shot of the Berkeley harem arranged in pyramidal fashion against a complex décor. Imperceptibly, the image of the actual women transmutes to that of a photographic representation. And in a parody of sexual entry, the number ends with Powell's head breaking through the image surface.

Thus what emerges in *Dames* is yet another sense of "the image of woman as image." For it is not so much the physical feminine *presence* that is celebrated in *Dames* as much as her synthetic, cinematic *image*. And ultimately the privileged status of that image and its mode of presentation propose it as a virtual *substitute* for woman herself. Von Sternberg had spoken of manipulating the female screen image into a "visual aphrodisiac."[16] But in *Dames* it seems, like Blondell's laundry, to have acquired the dimension of a fetish.

Once more we find ironic reverberations of the issue within the Enright narrative. In an early scene of the film, Horace Hemingway goes to visit his millionaire cousin, Ezra Ounce, and with polite duplicity remarks that his daughter, Barbara, sends her love. The following comic dialogue casually ensues, but in retrospect seems to encapsulate the dynamics of the portrayal of women in *Dames:*

> Ezra: Barbara sends her love to me? Why should Barbara send her love to me? She's never even seen me!
>
> Horace: She's seen your picture.
>
> Ezra: Well, then . . . *Maybe she's sending her love to my picture.*

(*continued from page 1*)

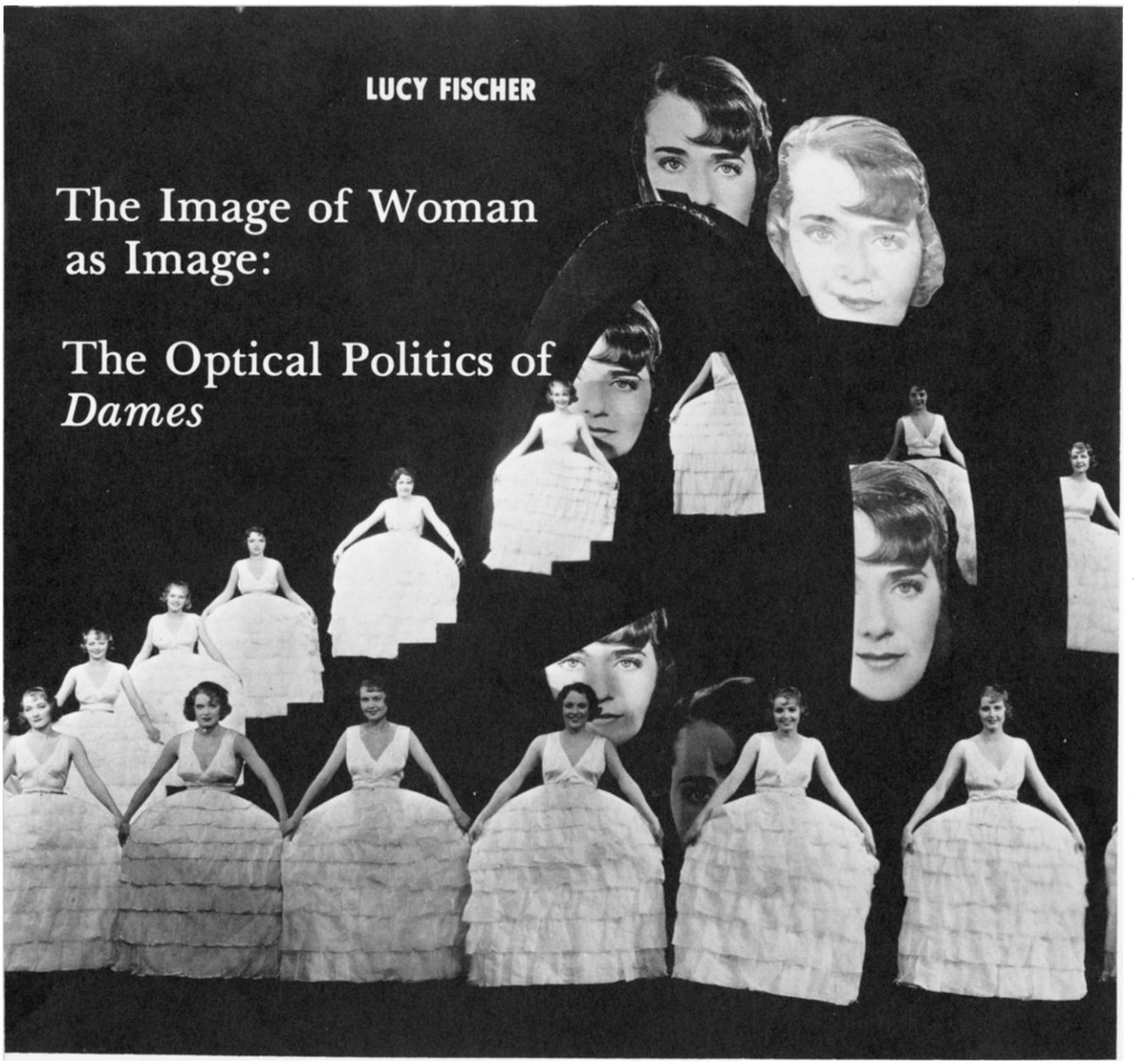
Poague a mistaken affiliation—he is at SUNY-Geneseo —through mixing him up with Peter Hogue (who *is* a contributor to *Movietone News*).

PERIODICALS

Since a great many university film classes are put on in language departments (English above all), it is not surprising to have a magazine called *Literature/Film Quarterly* ($2.00 per copy, $8.00 per year, from Salisbury State College, Salisbury, Md. 21801). The focus is primarily on adaptations and relations between film and theater or novel, but there are some general interviews with directors, some studies of films (*Night Porter*, for instance) without any special literary angle, and an occasional theoretical piece (such as a critique of Wollen's semiology). A few book reviews are also included in each issue. The contributors are all academics, which doesn't seem to make for the liveliest writing, but much careful thought can be found in each issue. Printed in blue ink, which tends to make many still look as if they're faded blueprints.

LUCY FISCHER

The Image of Woman as Image: The Optical Politics of *Dames*



I never had the intention of making eroticism or pornography. I love beautiful girls and I love to gather and show many beautiful girls with regular features and well-made bodies. It is the idea of spectacle which is expressed in "What do you go for?" What do you come to do, why do you go to a spectacle? It is not the story, it is not the stars, nor the music. What people want to see are beautiful girls.

—BUSBY BERKELEY[1]

In the proliferation of literature on the status of women in film the most common critical strategy has been that of distilling from the cinematic narrative an abstract "image" of women in film. Thus, from the reverential treatment accorded to the Gish persona in the films of D. W. Griffith, Marjorie Rosen extracts the image of woman as posed on a Victorian pedestal. From the relationship of the Doris Day character to her male protagonists she posits a vision of woman as militant

crusader for chastity. To characterize the adolescent film heroines of the fifties she conjures the image of Popcorn Venus.[2] Similarly, Molly Haskell compares the malign erotic presence of Rita Hayworth in *Lady from Shanghai* to that of a mythological siren, and reads from the machismo sexuality of contemporary cinema the image of woman as rape victim.[3]

In approaching the production numbers of Busby Berkeley, however, we encounter cinematic texts of another order. For rather than present us with a realistic narrative from which we must decoct a feminine "image," Berkeley's plastic abstractions present us with the essence of image itself—a vision of female stereotypes in their purest, most distillate form.

Berkeley's *mise-en-scène*, in fact, has a comic propensity to literalize the very metaphors upon which critics like Rosen and Haskell have seized in their characterization of the portrayal of women. While Griffith treats Lillian Gish as though she were on a pedestal, Berkeley, in *Broadway Serenade*, situates Jeanette MacDonald physically upon a pedestal. While some directors shroud their virginal heroines in an aura of sexual impenetrability, Berkeley, in "Pettin' in the Park," shrouds Ruby Keeler in a suit of metal armor. While films of the fifties cast women metaphorically in the role of Popcorn Venus, Berkeley, in *Fashions of 1934*, casts them literally as the goddess and her galley slaves. While certain stars have filled the screen with the sense of mythical sirens, Berkeley, in "By a Waterfall," fills the screen with the presence of mermaids themselves. Finally, as Molly Haskell finds the image of rape inscribed in the content of contemporary films, so one finds in the style of Berkeley's "through-the-leg tracking shots" implications of the sexual act transposed to the rhetoric of camera technique.

Thus Berkeley's production numbers provide a spectrum of images of women that range the continuum from Reverence to Rape. On this level Berkeley's *oeuvre* comes to constitute a definitive text upon the subject—an illustrated catalogue whose elegant pages display the cinematic image of woman in all its varied embodiments and incarnations.*

*In my analysis of *Dames* I will intentionally sidestep several issues which are nonetheless important but too complex to examine within the confines of a textual reading of the film. I introduce them here as a series of relevant questions: Can a film like *Dames* be judged aesthetically, independent of its underlying ideology? How exactly do films affect cultural attitudes? How do cultural attitudes affect films and our responses to them?

A privileged work in this respect is *Dames* (1934), a film whose very title seems to propose it as germane to a discussion of women in cinema. What distinguishes *Dames* from other works in the Berkeley repertoire is the manner in which its production numbers (with their symbolic discourse on the feminine stereotype) are implanted within a narrative that deals directly with the same thematic issues. The dramatic episodes of the film were, of course, directed by another man—Ray Enright. But it is, nonetheless, intriguing to examine this Centaurian construction and disclose the ways in which its discrete segments inflect upon each other and create a rather curious cinematic text. In its hybrid totality *Dames* constitutes an eccentric treatise addressed to three interlocking aspects of the portrayal of women in cinema: (1) the nature of the image of women in film; (2) the character of the relationship between the female screen presence and the male spectator and/or director; (3) the attitude of the Hollywood industry toward the position of women in the commercial film medium.

The Feminine Mystique and Cinematic Technique

While conventional film narratives situate their female personae in a realistic universe, the Berkeley production numbers posit their existence in the realm of pure imagery. The space in which his sequences transpire does not conform to that of the concrete external world. Rather, it is abstract, and in its fluid chain of spatial metamorphoses, essentially ambiguous. From this perspective it becomes the perfect décor for fantasy, and often the narrative prologues explicitly locate the numbers in a character's consciousness. "I Only Have Eyes for You," for example, proposes itself as an oneiric meditation occasioned by Dick Powell's having fallen asleep on the subway.

But beyond the motivational ploys of the framing stories, it is Berkeley's cinematic technique which renders screen space as quintessentially fantastic. Often the numbers unfold in a void, black space whose dimensions are unknowable.

The mechanics of concealed cuts transport us magically from one locale to another, creating a geography unnavigable by the human body. In "I Only Have Eyes for You," a cut-out face of Ruby Keeler falls away to reveal "behind" it a ferris wheel of costumed girls. In actuality, the sites are connected only by a splice and the implication of spatial relation is merely an illusion. Spatial paradoxes emerge as well. In "I Only Have Eyes for You," we leave Keeler on the exterior rim of the ferris wheel in one shot, only to discover her on its interior surface in another. Movement in the numbers likewise declares itself synthetic, as images rotate, girls fly up to the lens of the camera, or advance forward propelled by Eisensteinian Jump-cuts.[4]

If the geography of the numbers is unchartable, their temporality is unmeasurable; and it is as far removed from the flow of normal time as is that ebony vacuum from the coordinates of conventional space. The constraints of causality are similarly dissolved. Thus in "I Only Have Eyes for You," the external world responds to Dick Powell's obsessional fantasies and a crowd of people can be made to simply "disappear from view."

Given Berkeley's *mise-en-scène* as the potential environment of fantasy, with what particular visions of the female image is it populated?

One approach to the question entails an examination of Berkeley's formal technique and the manner in which certain myths concerning women are inscribed in the seemingly value-free level of plastic composition. One should keep in mind the obvious fact that excepting their narrative prologues the production numbers of *Dames* exclude the presence of men. They are, in fact, elaborate corporeo-plastic constructions of women's bodies "composed" in particular décors. Clearly those compositions are more than just pictorial; and from their physical arrangements of the female form can be read covert assumptions about the female "norm."

We might begin with the very concept of *stereotype* which on one level denotes "having no individuality, *as though cast from a mold.*" Ironically, this very notion of uniformity constitutes a stereotype in the depiction of women in film. One thinks of female screen personae in terms of *types* with a reflex that is not so automatic in the case of males. We have, for instance, the "blonde bombshell," the "femme fatale," the "vamp," the "gamin," or the "sex goddess." These are not "career" specifications as are the masculine labels of "gangster" or "cowboy," but rather categories of sexual proclivity and physical demeanor. Indeed the entire history of cinema can be seen as constituting an ongoing fashion show of popular female "styles."

This sense of the feminine screen persona as conforming to a particular type is nowhere more apparent than in the chorus-lines of Berkeley's production numbers. Part of the humor of the numbers, in fact, arises from our perception that the women look remarkably alike. This notion is eventually catapulted into another realm entirely in "I Only Have Eyes for You," where women are not merely similar but disconcertingly identical. Berkeley clearly prides himself on this stylistic penchant. He speaks in an interview of a particular day of hiring in which he auditioned 723 women to select only three:

> My sixteen regular girls were sitting on the side waiting; so after I picked the three girls I put them next to my special sixteen and they *matched just like pearls.* (Italics mine)[5]

Ultimately this conception of female as stereotype is embodied within the *mise-en-scène* of Berkeley's work, particularly in the production number also titled "Dames." There, as though to demonstrate the precise matching of the Berkeley girls, he lines them up behind one another until their multiplicity is subsumed in an image of apparent unity. "Dames" also contains a sequence emblematic of woman's alleged conformity to an external image: in depicting a row of show girls making up before their dressing-table mirrors, Berkeley deploys yet another row of women to represent their reflections. One thinks of Molly Haskell's statement on this issue and the way that Berkeley's iconography tends to literalize it. For in speaking of the genesis of feminine cinematic stereotypes, she refers to how the Gish persona was succeeded by a "long line of replica mirror-image virgins."[6]

Although Berkeley's relish of the chorus line takes on a transcendent quality, its presence is, after all, a convention of musical comedy. But his

mode of engaging it is not, and it is on this level of stylistic innovation that more significant attitudes toward women emerge. What happens in most Berkeley numbers (and quintessentially in "Dames") is that the women lose their individuation in a more profound sense than through the similarity of their physical appearance. Rather, their identities are completely consumed in the creation of an overall abstract design.

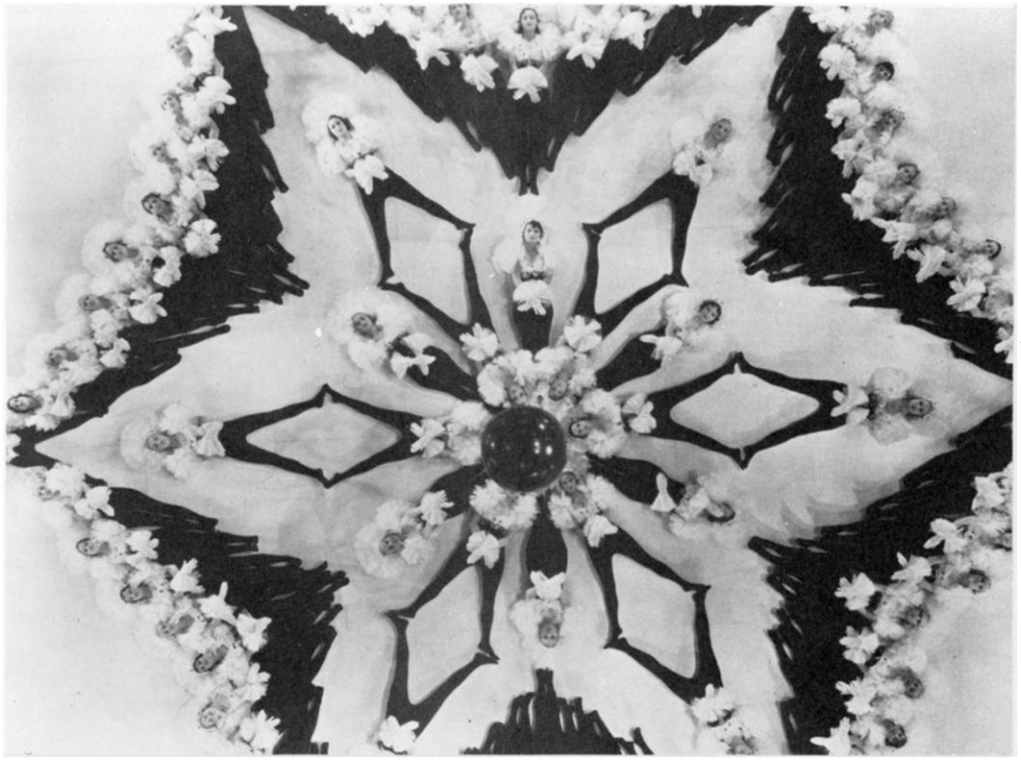
Furthermore the configurations of those designs can clearly be read for meaning. The perpetual arrangement of girls in circular format seems closely associated with symbols of female sexuality. The objects which the chorus line forms are equally tendentious. In "Dames" the girls delineate the sentimental boundaries of a heart. And in "The Shadow Waltz" in *Gold Diggers of 1933* they outline a shapely violin being bowed—a metaphor that any Freudian analyst would be proud to unpack. Thus in the Berkeley numbers the notion of women as sexual *objects* takes on a deviously witty relevance.

The chorus-line patterns tend as well to literalize the notion of two-dimensional feminine screen portrayal. If there is any match for the "flatness" of the Ruby Keeler character in the Enright narrative it is clearly the show girls in "Dames" whose bodies are pressed into black-and-white patterns, employed interchangeably with animated designs.

This reduction of the female form to biotic tile in an abstract mosaic is not devoid of overtones of power. It tends, in fact, to literalize the stereotype of the male director as potent Svengali who transforms the dull but malleable female form into an alluring screen presence. The words of von Sternberg seem particularly applicable to Berkeley's cinematic technique:

> It is the nature of woman to be passive, receptive, dependent on male aggression . . . In other words she is not normally outraged at being manipulated; on the contrary, she usually enjoys it. I have plenty of evidence to assume that no woman, as opposed to male, has ever failed to enjoy this possibly mortifying experience of *being reorganized in the course of incarnating my vision of her.*[7] (Italics mine.)

Even the narrative element of the production number "Dames" alludes to the sexuality of power: it portrays an all-male theatrical board of trustees which choreographs the careers of show girls from behind the scenes.



DAMES: *Circular motifs as symbols of feminine sexuality*

Privileged in the canon of female stereotypes is the conception of woman as decoration, a notion which has had its supreme manifestation in the history of film. Once more, in the iconography of the Berkeley sequences we find this cliché in its rarefied form, unencumbered by the obfuscations of a plot. For the function of the women in a number like "I Only Have Eyes for You" is essentially plastic, and their status is equal to that of the décor. They are, in fact, simply elements of the total *mise-en-scène*—facets of its comprehensive ornamental structure. Even the frills of their white organza dresses seem to tell us that they are, after all, pure "fluff."

Relevant to this impression is the curious fact that Berkeley girls did not (and, often, *could* not) dance—a phenomenon which accentuates our perception of their role as visual embellishments. As Berkeley himself unabashedly confesses:

> I never cared whether a girl knew her right foot from her left so long as she was beautiful. I'd get her to move or dance, or do something. All my girls were beautiful and some of them could dance a little, some of them couldn't.[8]

In a number like "I Only Have Eyes for You," the women's gestures (swaying back and forth or undulating the folds of their gowns) clearly do not function as choreography. Rather they serve as kinetic designs which interact dialectically with the complex trajectories of the mobile décor and the moving camera. But the awesome proficiency of Berkeley's mechanical décor tends to underscore the technical incompetence of the Berkeley girls and concretize the image of women as essentially passive. The sets of "I Only Have Eyes for You" are elaborate preprogrammed machines for action which transport the girls through dizzying cycles of aimless, repetitive movement. What heightens this sense of passivity is the zombiism of the Berkeley girls, a quality that they exude beneath the surface of their opaque, dissociative grins. The Berkeley girls, in fact, seem to extend passivity virtually into catatonia and propose the image of female as ambulatory Surrealist mannequin.

Ultimately what becomes apparent from a reading of Berkeley's *mise-en-scène* is the way in which he generates an image of woman as "image" itself. This portrayal proceeds on multiple levels. She is represented as image in terms of her embodiment of cultural stereotypes, and as image in her posture of conjured male projection. But the presentation of these first two conceptions depends upon the establishment of a third, and that is Berkeley's obsession with the status of woman as *film image*—as plastic, synthetic, celluloid screen object. Von Sternberg once said of Marlene Dietrich that "she was a perfect *medium* . . . who absorbed his direction and . . . responded to his conception of a female archetype."[9] While von Sternberg perhaps offered this rhetorically, Berkeley has embraced it literally. For through his articulation of woman as film image she becomes quite concretely a medium—one which in its pliancy can be molded to the configurations of the Berkeley imagination.

All these varied senses of woman as image seem encoded within the iconography of "I Only Have Eyes for You." It is, first of all, a sequence whose feminine imagery is diegetically situated within the realm of Dick Powell's fantasies. Its references to women and advertising (the subway posters for Society Cosmetics and Willards for the Hair) furthermore invoke the cultural clichés of surface beauty and vanity. But what is most important in the sequences occurs with the magical dissolves on the advertising posters (transforming each model's face into that of Ruby Keeler) and with the fluid bridge from the final poster to the huge Ruby Keeler head adrift in a black amorphous space. For through those shot transitions we move from the domain of extra-filmic senses of the female image to the possibilities of its embodiment in cinematic imagery itself.

During the course of the number Berkeley proceeds not only to catalogue those possibilities in formal terms but, ironically, to create a fabric of imagery that comments on his very act of creation. One thinks, for example, of a final segment of the number, comprised of an elaborate chain of process shots. First, we see Ruby Keeler step into a mock-up mirror frame, which becomes reduced in scale and supported by a base consisting of small Ruby Keeler figures aligned in apparent unity. Eventually the entire "mirror" is grasped by the hand of a large Ruby Keeler figure who enters from off-screen left. What we have here, of course, is a pictorial allegory—one which dramatizes the employment of women through cinematic processes to present and support a stereotypical

image of women. But the most evocative trope of the number comes in the form of the giant, jig-saw-puzzle vision of Ruby Keeler's face. What we see is an obedient cluster of three-dimensional women who proceed to cover their bodies with a two-dimensional photographic representation (a process which, significantly, is accomplished by lifting their skirts above their heads.) What is most intriguing, though, is the form that photograph takes. For it comes to us in the guise of a jig-saw puzzle—a fragmented version of an image that must be sequentially assembled. In his choice of this conceit Berkeley has again generated an iconography metaphoric of the portrayal of women in film. For it is a portrayal which, after all, involves the constitution of a giant synthetic image through the assemblage of interlocking pieces which we commonly refer to as "shots."

"Sweet and Hot"

In addition to translating certain stereotypes concerning women into the figurative discourse of cinematic imagery, Berkeley's *mise-en-scène* proposes a particular vision of female sexuality. In order to disclose this, however, it is necessary to locate Berkeley's production numbers within the narrative framework of Enright's *Dames,* and to situate *Dames* within the historical context of film censorship.

The Hollywood production code officially came into being in 1930; but since there were no adequate enforcement provisions it remained for some time merely an advisory document.[10] In the early thirties, public criticism of film content mounted and, according to Richard Randall in *Censorship of the Movies,* the year 1934 (the release date of *Dames*) marked "the turning point of self-regulation":

> American Catholic bishops formed the Legion of Decency to review and rate films. At the same time they threatened the industry with a general boycott by Catholic patrons if the moral tone of films did not improve. This pressure resulted in the MPPDA's [Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America] formation of the Production Code Administration (PCA) as a quasi-independent, self-supporting body charged with enforcing and interpreting the code.[11]

Evidently the power of the MPPDA and the PCA was based on their domination by the five largest companies in the industry which, in turn, controlled 70% of the film theaters.

In this historical perspective the plot of *Dames* seems an ingenious parody of the censorship of movies. For the Legion of Decency, we have the Ounce Foundation for the Elevation of American Morals. (The constant reference to the organization as the "O.F. for the E. of A. M." seems to mock the alphabetics of the MPPDA and the PCA as well). For the censorship of film is substituted the censorship of theater. In keeping with the economic realities of film censorship Ezra Ounce (Hugh Herbert) is portrayed as a millionaire and the opening sequence of the film catalogues the name plaques of the myriad enterprises which constitute his monopolistic empire.

Typically, Ezra Ounce's specific objections to the theater focus on the figure of the show girl. It is the flagrant display of women on the musical stage that he identifies as the source of its moral danger.

Clearly we are to regard Ezra Ounce as a blustering fool, a repressed, adolescent man who mistakes "good clean fun" for sinful prurience. After all, what goes on on the stage of the theater is to be *so* innocuous as to permit the participation of the antiseptic Ruby Keeler (who plays his niece, Barbara).

But ironically what Ezra Ounce supposedly views on the stage as theatrical numbers within the diegesis of *Dames* are, in actuality, the cinematic insertions of Busby Berkeley. This stylistic dislocation is echoed by a shift in sensibility as well. For while the Enright narrative proceeds to spoof the need for censorship of female sexuality, the Berkeley numbers intercede to present it in more slyly perverse configurations than Ezra could have anticipated (or even perhaps appreciated.) This tonal disjunction seems epitomized in the title

of the fictional musical comedy from which the numbers emerge, which is "Sweet and Hot." For the diegesis of the film would have us believe that what transpires on the stage is naively "sweet." But the realities of our viewing experience contradict this and assert that what Berkeley depicts on the screen is unremittingly "hot."

"The Girl at the Ironing Board," for example, presents us with what was called in those days a "specialty number." The epithet seems peculiarly apt since it unfolds as a comic vignette on the sexual "specialty" of fetishism. It begins with Joan Blondell voyeuristically peering through the laundry window at a loving couple in a carriage outside. She sings:

Nobody ever has whispered to me
The sweet things a girl loves to hear
Nobody's arms ever twined around mine
Still I'm not lonely for romance is near—
A girl who works at the laundry
Has a dream lover all of her own
A lover, unseen, whose love she keeps clean
With water and soap and a washing machine.

Then, as though the subject of erotic symbolism and fetishistic partialism were not sufficiently overt, she continues:

There is something about your pajamas
That fills me with sweet ecstacy
And because it's part of you,
I'm learning to love you
So bring back your laundry to me.

The rest of the number dramatizes the notion of fetish as symbolic substitute for the "normal" sexual object. We see animated male laundry sing and gesture to her from the clothes-line; she even whisks a pair of longjohns from the pile and dances off with them. At the end of the number she is "gang raped" by a mass of laundry which slides down upon her from the lines.

In keeping with the fetishism syndrome the number represents the fetish in the context of a series from which Blondell choses a favorite partner with "whom" she departs:

> The construction of a series of love objects is exhibited in the [fetishist's] choice of a partner by first imagining a whole row of possibilities and then . . . picking one of them as a favorite.[12]

Significantly, the one aspect of the number that

does not conform to the syndrome is the notion of the fetishist as female. Although stereotypes of sexual behavior are currently under re-evaluation for their cultural determinants, it is nonetheless the case that as late as the Kinsey report of 1953 fetishism was considered an overwhelmingly male syndrome.[13] Thus in "The Girl at the Ironing Board" we would seem to have a clear case of the imposition of a classically male fantasy on the behavior of a female screen persona.[14]

Finally, "The Girl at the Ironing Board" abounds in elements that seem to comment parodistically on the idea of censorship. After its eccentric portrayal of sexuality, the sequence ends on the sacharrine note of a chirping bird which sings as Blondell and her laundry walk into the sunset. The Griffith-like sentimentality of this touch is comically false, as disingenuous as the stuffed bird itself which sits on an artificial prop tree.

One thinks as well of the song lyric which speaks of "keeping love clean" as one views this as a work whose implications had by-passed the process of Production Code laundering. The propriety of the numbers is much like the moral status of Horace

Hemingway (Guy Kibbee) which Ezra Ounce suspects is "nothing but a snare and illusion."

From the reviews at the time of the film's release, it seems likely that its implications escaped the public eye, as they had that of Ezra Ounce. An innocuous *New York Times* review of August 26, 1934, for example, described it simply as "an original combination of comedy and song . . . which is staged very cleverly."

The Gold Diggers or The Men With the Movie Cameras

But certain things clearly did not excape the public eye and it is precisely to the subject of spectator vision that one must turn to complete an analysis of *Dames.*

The title number of the film confronts the issue most explicitly. It beings with an all-male theatrical board meeting at which various investors argue about the elements which insure commercial stage success. One says: "I tell you gentlemen, if I'm going to put money into this show I want to be sure that we get the best music possible." Others interrupt advocating the importance of story or publicity until finally Dick Powell breaks into a song which establishes the economic base of show business on the male desire to look at women:

> *Who writes the words and music for all the girlie shows?*
> *No one cares and no one knows.*
> *Who is handsome hero some villain always frames?*
> *Who cares if there's a plot or not, if its got a lot of dames.*
> *What do you go for? Go see the show for?*
> *Tell the truth—you go to see those beautiful dames.*

Then as a horde of show girls enter the board room he expounds on this theme more thoroughly and reveals that the true gold diggers are to be found in the corporate male bureaucracy, and not in the chorus line as generally supposed:

> *Leave your addresses, my big successes*
> *All depend a lot upon you beautiful dames.*
> *Oh dames are necessary to show business*
> *Dames—without you there would be no business.*
> *Your knees in action, that's the attraction*
> *What good's a show without you beautiful dames.*

After this framing episode the sequence erupts into the actual production number. Significantly it emphasizes women's "knees in action" as the girls' black-stockinged legs are employed to create geometric designs against a pure white floor.

Aside from "Dames," however, the theme of vision is referred to in almost every lyric of the score. One song is entitled "Try To See It My Way"; another (a fantasy of prenatal love) has Powell confessing that he adored Keeler when she "was a smile on her mother's lips and a twinkle in her father's eye." There is, of course, "I Only Have Eyes for You" which alternately represents the love of a woman as optical illusion and optical obsession.

But not only is the act of looking alluded to in the song lyrics of *Dames,* it is invoked in the mode of presenting the imagery of the production numbers themselves. Inscribed in Berkeley's optical stylistics is a virtual discourse on voyeurism and its relation to the female screen presence: the "Kino-Eye" has become that of a Peeping Tom. This notion is even brought to the literal surface of the narrative as one shot reveals an insert of a gossip column, "On the Rialto," whose byline is none other than Peeping Tom.

The implicit thesis of cinema as voyeuristic enterprise (as *spectacle*) is advanced on many levels in Berkeley's production numbers. One thinks immediately of his anecdote concerning his introduction of the close-up into the vocabulary of the film musical. Evidently Sam Goldwyn came on the set of *Whoopee* and questioned Berkeley about his motivation for the technique. Berkeley responded: "Well, we've got all the beautiful girls in the picture. Why not let the public see them?"[15]

Thus just as Berkeley comprehended the difference between the choreographic potential of theater and cinema, so too he seems to have grasped the difference in their voyeuristic appeal. For the close-up has the power to annihilate the spatial gap which distances the theatrical spectator from the female stage presence.

The number which most clearly transposes the issue of voyeurism into stylistic terms is "Dames." Berkeley fills the screen with girls clothed in provocative "Fredericks of Hollywood"-type negligées and has them engaged in the visually taboo pursuits of sleeping, bathing, and dressing. As though to shame the camera for its intrusion, however, the lens is continually punished by the withdrawal of sight. A whole chain of such instances occurs in the beginning of the number. In

the first such shot, girls run up to the camera and obscure the lens with the fabric of their nightgowns. Then in a masked cut (with attendant change of décor) the fabric is removed to reveal a girl in a bath tub. The girl proceeds to cover the lens with a powder puff which (through another masked cut) is removed by a girl at a dressing table. Eventually the girl takes a bottle of perfume and sprays the surface of the lens. We next see the lens wiped clean, but this time our vision is identified with a particular male stagehand and the lens has become a window through which he watches the show girls approach.

This dialectic of seeing and being prevented from seeing is epitomized in the number's final voyeuristic character, a "blind" man who sheepishly removes his dark glasses to stare at the show girls who pass on the street. (We should remember that as English lengend has it Peeping Tom was, in fact, a Coventry tailor who went blind after peering at Lady Godiva.)

Although Berkeley plays on the notion of camera as voyeuristic tool, he nonetheless conceals its presence. While mirrors figure dominantly in the imagery of the numbers (the "mirror" of women in "I Only Have Eyes for You," and the dressing-table "mirrors" in "Dames") they are most often false surfaces which refuse to reflect an image of the camera or of the man who stands behind it.

But the iconography of the Berkeley numbers seem to go beyond engaging the female screen persona as source of mere voyeuristic pleasure. For in addition to the numbers whose effect depends on the prescence of *actual* women one is struck by the existence of sequences content with their photographic image.

We might recall, for example, that on the subway in "I Only Have Eyes for You" Dick Powell conspicuously ignores the corporeal reality of Ruby Keeler to embark on a fantasy digression based on her photographic likeness. But the issue seems crystallized in the final sequence of "Dames." What we see on the screen is a shot of the Berkeley harem arranged in pyramidal fashion against a complex décor. Imperceptibly, the image of the actual women transmutes to that of a photographic representation. And in a parody of sexual entry, the number ends with Powell's head breaking through the image surface.

Thus what emerges in *Dames* is yet another sense of "the image of woman as image." For it is not so much the physical feminine *presence* that is celebrated in *Dames* as much as her synthetic, cinematic *image*. And ultimately the privileged status of that image and its mode of presentation propose it as a virtual *substitute* for woman herself. Von Sternberg had spoken of manipulating the female screen image into a "visual aphrodisiac."[16] But in *Dames* it seems, like Blondell's laundry, to have acquired the dimension of a fetish.

Once more we find ironic reverberations of the issue within the Enright narrative. In an early scene of the film, Horace Hemingway goes to visit his millionaire cousin, Ezra Ounce, and with polite duplicity remarks that his daughter, Barbara, sends her love. The following comic dialogue casually ensues, but in retrospect seems to encapsulate the dynamics of the portrayal of women in *Dames:*

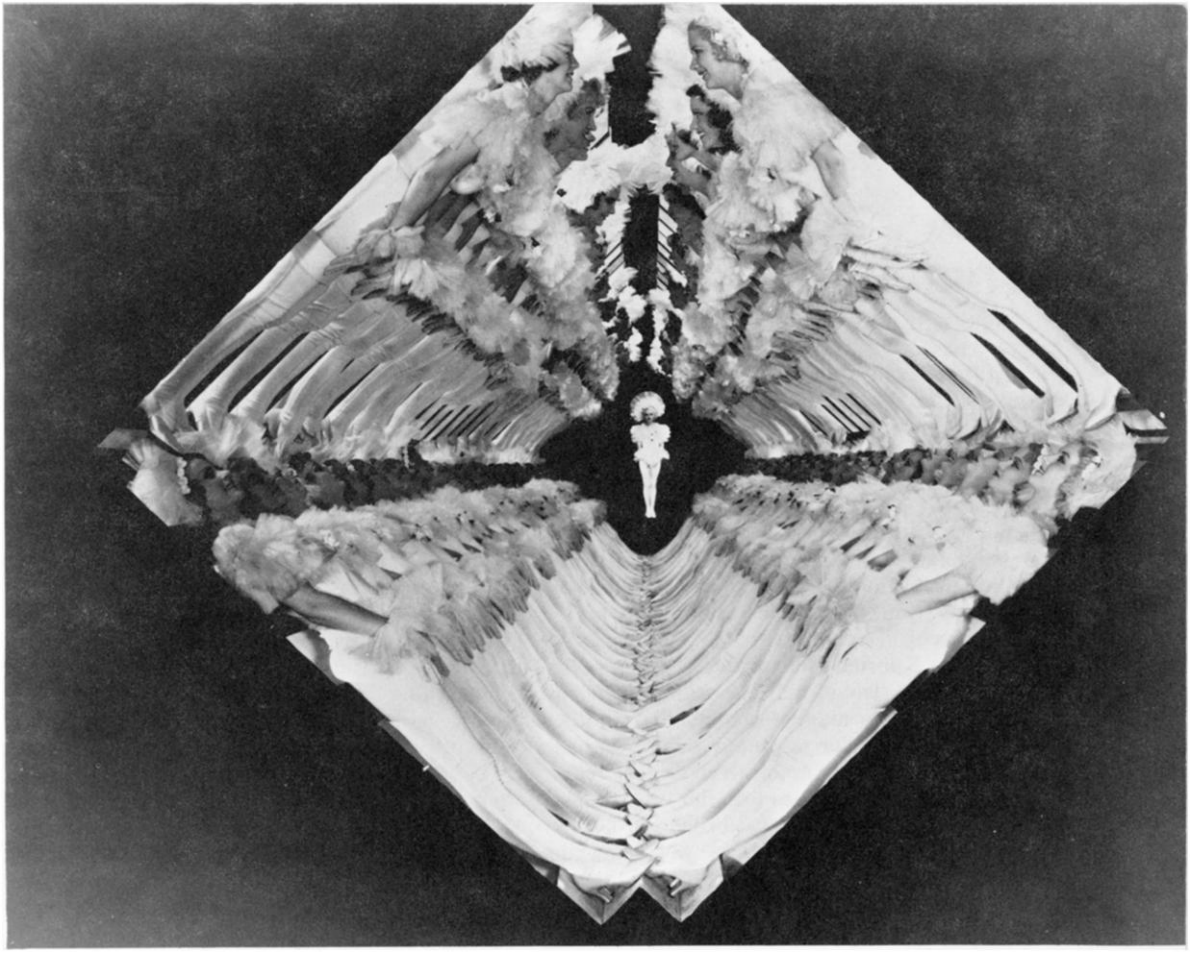
> Ezra: Barbara sends her love to me? Why should Barbara send her love to me? She's never even seen me!
>
> Horace: She's seen your picture.
>
> Ezra: Well, then . . . *Maybe she's sending her love to my picture.*

(*continued from page 1*)

Poague a mistaken affiliation—he is at SUNY-Geneseo —through mixing him up with Peter Hogue (who *is* a contributor to *Movietone News*).

PERIODICALS

Since a great many university film classes are put on in language departments (English above all), it is not surprising to have a magazine called *Literature/Film Quarterly* ($2.00 per copy, $8.00 per year, from Salisbury State College, Salisbury, Md. 21801). The focus is primarily on adaptations and relations between film and theater or novel, but there are some general interviews with directors, some studies of films (*Night Porter*, for instance) without any special literary angle, and an occasional theoretical piece (such as a critique of Wollen's semiology). A few book reviews are also included in each issue. The contributors are all academics, which doesn't seem to make for the liveliest writing, but much careful thought can be found in each issue. Printed in blue ink, which tends to make many still look as if they're faded blueprints.



NOTES

1. Busby Berkeley, "Rencontre avec le grand 'Architecte du Musical,' " *Cinéma*, #103 (Feb. 1966), p. 44.
2. Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus* (New York: Avon, 1973), paraphrase of material on pages 71, 211, 300ff.
3. Molly Haskell, *From Reverence To Rape* (New York: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 204, p. 323ff.
4. I am referring to the series of triadic "jump-cuts" which occur during the coronation sequence in *Ivan the Terrible—Part I.*
5. B. Pike & D. Martin, *The Genius of Busby Berkeley* (Reseda, California: Creative Film Society), p. 64.
6. Haskell, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
7. Josef von Sternberg, *Fun in a Chinese Laundry* (New York: MacMillan, 1965), p. 120.
8. Pike and Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-53.
9. Josef von Sternberg, Introduction to *The Blue Angel—Classic Film Script* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968) p. 12.
10. Richard Randall, *Censorship In The Movies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), p. 199.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Wilhelm Stekel, *Disorders of the Instincts and Emotions* (New York: Liveright, 1952), p. 33.
13. A Kinsey, W. Pomeroy, C. Martin, P. Gebhard, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (New York: Pocket Books, 1953), p. 679.
14. The overtones of fetishism in the iconography of *Dames* would seem to go beyond this particular number. In the Enright narrative we have the absurd character of Ezra Ounce who is depicted on several occasions toying obsessively with a series of ceramic elephants. And the image of dozens of Benda-masked Ruby Keeler likenesses in "I Only Have Eyes for You" has the distinct sense of fetishistic partialism (the necessity for the love object to display particular attributes). Even the precise "matching" of the chorus girls carries similar implications.
15. Tony Thomas and Jim Terry, *The Busby Berkeley Book* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1973), p. 25.
16. Von Sternberg, Introduction to *The Blue Angel, op. cit.*, p. 12.

HANS FELDMANN

Kubrick and His Discontents

Barry Lyndon will almost certainly increase the confusion that has attended Stanley Kubrick's reputation since the release of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. For the technical aspects of his art, Kubrick is now generally acknowledged to be one of America's top three or four directors. But does the man have anything intelligent or intelligible to say; or does, as one reviewer has said with reference to *A Clockwork Orange*, his "intellectual poverty" limit his movies to "popfad art"? Since the recognized success of *Dr. Strangelove*, objections to Kubrick's obscurity, his enigmatic mind, his bleak view of man, his simplistic view of life, his boring mannerisms abound in the reviews of his films. *Barry Lyndon* seems destined to encourage the same ambivalent critical reaction. The preliminary reviews of the film almost unanimously praise its technical brilliance, but as often as not the reviewer ends by yawning with boredom. Is it, after all, anything more than a three-hour slide show for art-history majors? Stanley Kubrick apparently has nothing clear or profound or interesting or moving to say, but he says it magnificently. The assumption behind such critical evaluations of the film is that Kubrick's art exists merely as technique, that he gives us form without substance.

The confusion is compounded when one considers the source of his latest movie: Thackeray's first novel, *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*. It is not a very good novel, and Kubrick's deviations from his source are so surprising at times that one wonders what he saw in the novel to consider filming it in the first place. He excludes from the film a host of the novel's characters and he radically changes many others, notably Lady Lyndon and her son Lord Bullingdon. Reverend Runt appears in only one scene in the novel and has nothing to say. Hackton Castle's financial advisor, Graham, is entirely Kubrick's invention. So are certain scenes: Captain Feeny's robbery of the young Redmond on the Dublin Road, the duel between Bullingdon and Barry in the abandoned church, and the final scene in which Lady Lyndon, Bullingdon, Runt, and Graham are settling the estate's accounts and putting the castle back in order. In the novel, Lady Lyndon escapes from Barry without the aid of Bullingdon, who is in Canada at the time. Barry is forced into exile by the pressure of his debts and dies of delirium tremens after spending 19 years in Fleet Prison. He never loses a leg in a duel with Bullingdon.

One thing is obvious from these deviations: Kurick is not at all interested in faithfully reproducing another artist's interpretation of life. He has his own reading of life and he feels free to alter arbitrarily another artist's work in order to express his vision, his interpretation of his age. As an artist, Kubrick has developed at a remarkable pace, and it is interesting to follow his progress from the early melodramatic entertainment, *The Killing*, through the more subtle character studies in *Lolita* and *Paths of Glory*, to the nihilistic satire of *Dr. Strangelove*. This last movie alone earns him an artist's right to be taken seriously by his critics. To dismiss *Barry Lyndon* as a beautiful, but meaningless, piece of technical virtuosity, is to deny Kubrick the serious critical attention that is now his due.

In *Barry Lyndon*, Kubrick is making a significant statement about *his* age. In fact, along with *2001* and *A Clockwork Orange*, *Barry Lyndon* completes a trilogy on the moral and psychological nature of Western man and on the destiny of his civilization. *2001* itself is perhaps an emotionally and psychologically necessary response on Kubrick's part to the nihilism of *Dr. Strangelove*. The basic argument of the "Space Odyssey" is that mankind will survive the impending collapse of Western civilization. The film ends with an affirmation of life, an affirmation of the adven-

Sublimated savages: the court of England.

turous human spirit. Kubrick's affirmation, it is true, takes place outside of his cultural tradition, and the basic philosophical assumptions of the movie reject the Hebraic-Christian ideology that has functioned as the cohesive center of Western civilization for the past 2000 years. But if Kubrick rejects the Christian idea of God, he nevertheless believes a civilization can develop only if it is rooted in *an* idea of God. He would be very much surprised, he has said in a *New York Times* interview, "if the universe wasn't full of an intelligence of an order that to us would seem God-like." The "Space Odyssey" predicts man's imminent effort to re-establish contact with that divine intelligence.

In rejecting the claims of Western Hebraic-Christian civilization to significant order and meaningful form with the filming of *2001,* Kubrick does not submit to the Romantic argument that civilization corrupts the intrinsically good natural man. His view of man is clearly Freudian: the primal facet of the human personality is the id, the completely self-oriented structure that demands immediate gratification of its instinctual urges for food, shelter, and the propagation of itself. It is not moral or intellectual or sensitive to the needs or feelings of others. It simply is. Kubrick's fascination with this aspect of human personality can be traced from the prehuman creatures that achieve the miracle of conceptual thought at the beginning of *2001,* through the character of Alex in *A Clockwork Orange,* to the sublimated savages who inhabit the fashionable courts of Europe in *Barry Lyndon.*

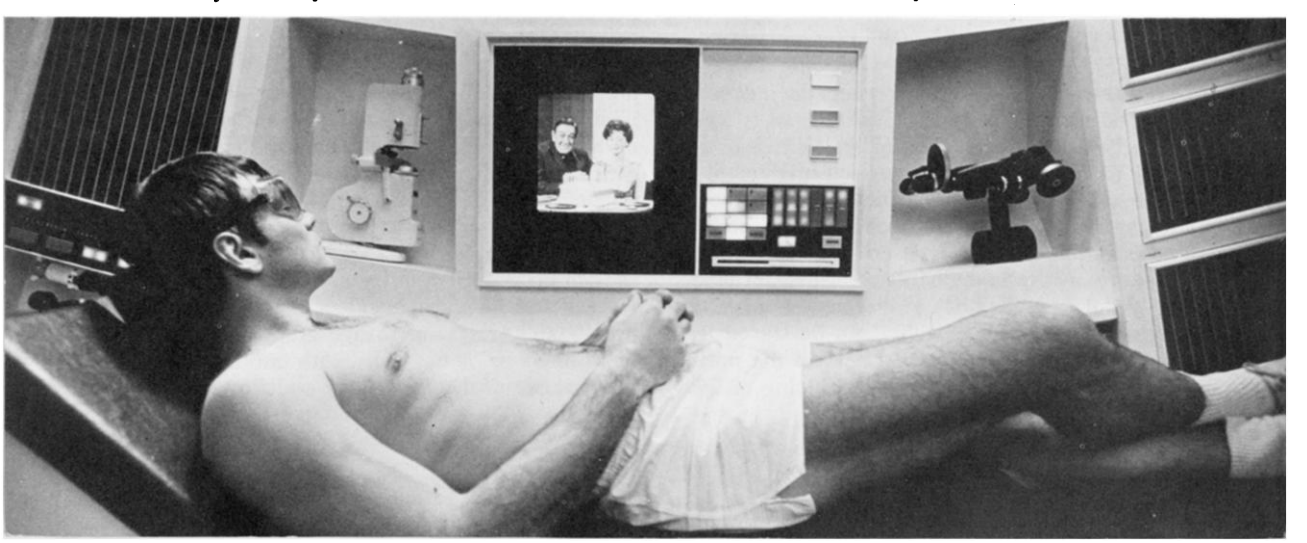
Kubrick's trilogy is a disturbing study of a decadent civilization, decadent because the life-forms it has established for man to achieve the expression of his essential self are founded upon a false conception of the nature of man. Yet for all the bleakness that the critics have argued informs Kubrick's view of man, for all his negativism and pessimism, Kubrick is nevertheless struggling to strike an affirming note. Rebirth, renewal, the regeneration of the adventurous human spirit is the major dramatic point of *2001.* The civilization that begins when the prehuman creature, sitting before the skeleton of an animal, conceptualizes the thought that he can use an element in his environment as an extension of his will to gain dominion over his environment inevitably culminates with the astronauts voyaging through space on a mission to contact the suprahuman intelligence responsible for the monolith that has been uncovered on the moon. The immense distance between what man has become and what he began as is most dramatically expressed in the sudden juxtaposition of images that link the first two parts of the movie together: the image of the prehuman's ecstasy of savage gratification as he hurls the bone he has killed with into the air and the image of the spaceliner waltzing between

heaven and earth. Conceptual thought, first used for the immediate gratification of the instinctual need for food, has ultimately delivered mankind to the threshold of some cataclysmic discovery about itself and about the universe which is its home.

But *2001* is not finally a panegyric to Western civilization; it is, on the contrary, a prophecy of its doom. The substance of a Kubrick movie is always delivered through the images projected onto the screen; seldom, if ever, is it delivered through the dialogue. The scenes of the surviving astronaut who lands upon Jupiter, dines at an eighteenth-century table, and lies upon his death bed are certainly intended by Kubrick to suggest the impending extinction of the civilization whose technology has put him there. The concluding scenes are emblems meant to suggest the brittleness of the whole of Western civilization. The most subtly suggestive scene is the eighteenth-century dining scene, for it balances two earlier eating scenes: the savage consumption of food by the prehumans, who rip the raw flesh from the bones with their teeth, and the meal on board the *Discovery,* when the astronauts dine on synthetic foodstuff prepared by the computer. The fragility and effeteness of civilization are emphasized when the astronaut shatters his crystal glass during the formal ritual that the act of eating has become in the eighteenth century. Kubrick clearly understands the acquisition of food to be the primal need of the instinctual man. In formalizing the act of eating, in disguising its essential bestiality with crystal and china and silverware and linen, man imbues the primal necessity with a dignity it does not intrinsically possess. The brittleness of the eating instruments which distance man from his instinctual self reflects the brittleness of what man has become.

Kubrick perceives that man, separated from his primal self, has become a mere mechanical force and is now little more than the instrument of the abstractions that he once conceptualized to serve him. This point he persistently and ironically enforces throughout the movie in the conflict he sets up between HAL and the astronauts. It is HAL who is the more human in his actions, the astronauts who are mechanical and faultless. HAL makes the mistake that jeopardizes the mission, commits murder, begs for his life. Neither astronaut, on the other hand, ever displays any emotion, and for Kubrick, mechanical man is a dead tree. Yet, the star-child that ascends into the cosmos at the film's conclusion emphasizes Kubrick's faith that man can renew himself, that he can in fact be "born again."

Thus, in spite of the film's many negative suggestions and overtones, the emphasis of *2001* is on birth and the regeneration of some primal human energy that urged man through a whole cycle of civilization. Two birthdays are celebrated during the course of the movie, the *Discovery* suggests a spermatozoon impregnating a cosmic womb, one astronaut has his umbilical life-lines cut and is hurled to his death in a reverse birth image, and the other astronaut dies just before the embryonic star-child ascends into the cosmos. The death of one way of life is the birth of



another. Kubrick does not know what new directions reborn man will take, but he believes the new direction will be initiated by a reconnection with the "God-like intelligence" that informs the universe. The force manifests itself in the monolith that appears just before the genius among the prehumans thinks his thought and impels the species through the cycle of civilization that culminates with the astronaut upon Jupiter, which is named, appropriately enough, after the chief divinity in Roman mythology. The appearance of the monolith on the moon initiates the space odyssey, and its appearance again at the deathbed of the astronaut clearly suggests that the rebirth of the human spirt will establish the species upon a broader spiritual basis than that upon which it had previously existed.

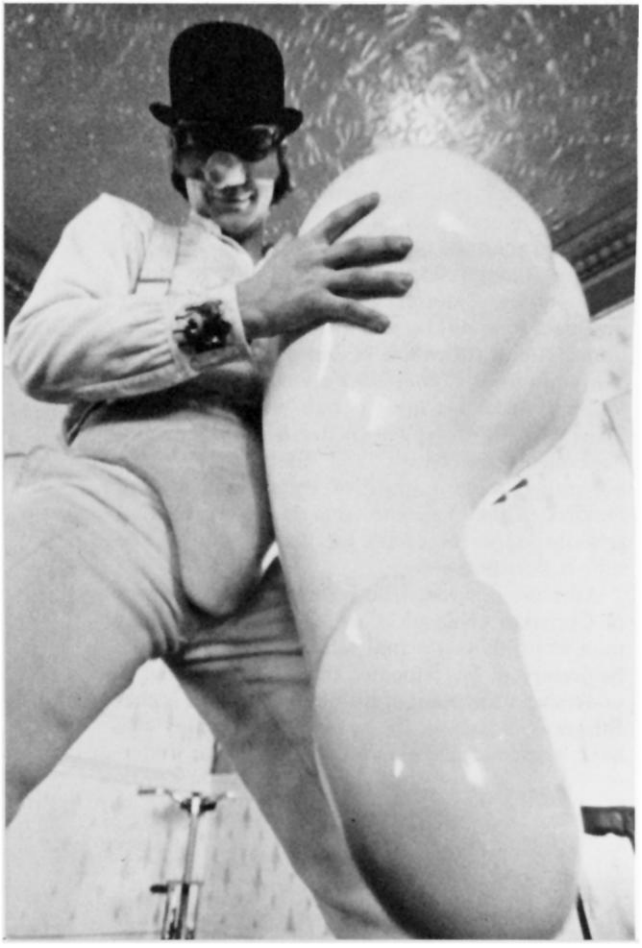
The assumption upon which the argument of *2001* is based is that Western civilization is moribund, that its cultural forms and social institutions no longer provide man with the significant order that makes life meaningful experience. In his next two movies, Kubrick's principal interest is to study the relationship between the individual man and the cultural forms through which that individual must achieve the expression of himself. At the heart of *A Clockwork Orange* and *Barry Lyndon* is the great philosophical question that is at the heart of all great art: What is man, and what must he *do* with his life? The orthodox Christian answer, that man is the supreme creation of God and must do the will of his creator as it has been revealed to him to achieve the salvation of his soul, has lost much of its credibility in the post-Nietzschean, post-Freudian, post-Einsteinian world, with the result that cynicism and despair threaten the very will of man to survive. Albert Camus, for example, has insisted that the only philosophical question that requires an answer today is the question of suicide, and it is really not too extravagant a generalization to say that most of the significant art of the twentieth century is an effort by the artist to affirm life, to justify the daily effort required not to commit suicide. Kubrick continues to sound the life-affirming note with which he concluded *2001* in both *A Clockwork Orange* and *Barry Lyndon.*

HAL, Alex, and Redmond Barry comprise a strange trio of modern heroes, for they contradict all the virtues Western culture has taught man to respect. HAL is a mere machine, Alex a brutal and violent hoodlum, and Barry a cruel, dishonest scoundrel. Yet all three emerge from their films as the most attractive and sympathetic characters, and for the same reason: they all are the most *human* characters in their environments. Those critics who condemn Kubrick for playing some sort of trick on the audience by making Alex a sympathetic character have committed themselves to the cultural assumptions it is Kubrick's major effort to debunk. If the answer to the great philosophical question is that man is some special creation of God who should dye his hair blue, live in a plastic apartment hundreds of feet in the air, and spend his days accumulating the platitudes and pop art of his culture, then Alex is indeed a threat to the moral order of the universe.

That Alex is a threat to his social order is the point of *A Clockwork Orange,* for Kubrick presents him as the chief evidence that the significant order of civilization is collapsing. Alex is the Freudian id, the savage instinctual man who operates only to gratify his basic urges. Socially, morally, emotionally he is no more advanced than the prehumans at the beginning of *2001.* Although Alex has the ability to think conceptually, he uses the talent for no better purposes than do the prehumans, that is, for the immediate gratification of his instinctual urges. The difference is that Alex's environment is no longer hostile: his meat is butchered for him in invisible stockyards, his shelter is provided by a benevolent government, and his instinct toward self-propagation is gratified by accommodating females. Thus the expression of his instinctual self, no longer necessary for the survival of the self, is horrifying.

Anthony Burgess, who believes that the forms of Christian civilization are necessary to protect man from his instinctual self and therefore must be preserved, has lamented that Kubrick failed to understand the point of his novel. The fact is that Burgess, as well as the many movie critics who have appreciated the novel, has failed to under-

stand the point of Kubrick's movie, which is grounded in a Freudian view of the dynamics of civilization. In *Civilization and Its Discontents,* Freud argues that a civilization progresses as it develops forms and institutions to restrict the free expression of the primal, asocial, instinctual id, or at least as it develops life-forms which permit the sublimation of its expression. Yet even the sublimated forms of civilization inevitably frustrate the vital, primal urges of the instinctual man; thus the "discontents" of Freud's title. Kubrick's discontents with civilization's forms are not only because they frustrate the instinctual man, but also because they deny that the instinctual self is intrinsic to man's nature. Kubrick insists upon this point throughout *A Clockwork Orange* by juxtaposing the brutal enactment of instinctual urges with sublimated expressions of those urges. The popular song "Singin' in the Rain," for example, is a sentimental, sublimated expression of the same urge that is compelling Alex to the act he commits while singing it. Beethoven's music is a "higher" expression of the same instinctual compulsions, and when Alex attacks the health-spa proprietress with the sculpture of a phallus, she counters by swinging a bust of the great composer at him. Political activity is also no more than the sublimated urge to overpower all that is outside the id. The final scene of the movie, in which the government minister attempts to win Alex's endorsement and frees him to the strains of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony,* is perhaps overly contrived in its symbolism: the minister is metaphorically feeding his id as he is literally feeding Alex. Yet Malcolm McCowell's chewing performance in the scene projects all the libidinal energy that is Alex's vital characteristic and that somehow marks him as the healthiest individual in the movie.



If Freud is correct in arguing that civilization progresses as it develops forms and institutions to control the spontaneous expression of the id, then the converse becomes possible: a civilization in decline would be marked by the increasing ineffectuality of those forms to control the expression of the id and eventually by the unhampered re-emergence of the id itself. Alex is thus the chief manifestation of a collapsing civilization, as well as the chief threat to the continued viability of his culture's claims to meaningful forms. The thrust of Kubrick's insight, however, carries one step further. Although he presents Alex as the main force which is eroding the significant order of Western civilization, he also perceives that Alex embodies the libidinal energy which will drive the faltering human spirit through the collapse of that civilization. It is this characteristic which generates sympathy for Alex, which makes him the "hero" of the movie. Alex is the only character in the movie who is *not* a clockwork orange. He is the only character who never submits to the restricting and falsifying forms of his society, who never becomes the mechanical adjunct of moral or ethical or political abstractions, who operates always and only

from his primal, instinctual, human self. He is by no means admirable, but Kubrick insists that he is a real part of every man.

"Any attempt to create social institutions on a false view of the nature of man is probably doomed to failure," Kubrick has claimed in his *New York Times* interview. That the forms and institutions of Western civilization deny the Alex in every man, and therefore can only deform the social man as he seeks to express his essential self through them, is the central theme of *Barry Lyndon.* Redmond Barry's failure to achieve selfhood in the terms prescribed by his society is his tragedy, and by extension the tragedy of Western man. Eighteenth-century Europe, the world in which Barry must achieve self-hood, represents for Kubrick, as it had at the end of *2001,* Western civilization at its most formal stage of development. Conformity to the innumerable codes of ritualized social conduct was essential for any man wishing to establish his value as a man. Barry, in his effort to become a "gentleman," accepts the validity of all the institutions of his day. Only once does he fail to act according to form, and that once destroys all his efforts to achieve his peerage, the highest life-form then available to man.

No critic will complain about the violence in *Barry Lyndon.* Yet numerically there are more violent scenes in *Barry Lyndon* than in *A Clockwork Orange.* Only in the scene in which Barry brutally attacks his stepson, however, does Kubrick present the violence as a savage phenomenon. The rest of the violent scenes are enacted according to rules which deny the source of the violent inspiration: in fact, the inspiration is falsified by being dignified with ritual. The scenes are countless: men and boys are shot, robbed, flogged, and beaten throughout the movie, but all according to forms which Western man had come to accept. In the British army, for example, Barry beats a fellow soldier to insensibility, but according to the rules of fair play—no biting, kicking, or scratching. First they are made to shake hands. The British soldiers march in straight ranks upon the straight ranks of French soldiers, whom they hope to impale upon their bayonets. In the Prussian army, men are made to walk the gauntlet for minor offenses. Major offenses are punished by mutilation. Kubrick, perhaps responding to the criticism of gratuitous violence in *A Clockwork Orange,* decided not to film any scene of mutilation.

The core of Kubrick's insight in *Barry Lyndon* is this: the forms of civilization, which are intended to repress or sublimate the savage nature of man, only work to deform the social man. Barry's tragedy is that, in seeking to achieve the expression of himself—to "become" himself—he submits to all the values and life-forms of his culture. Surely no one today would argue that man fulfills God's will best by wearing powdered wigs and false beauty marks or by demanding satisfaction for insults by ritualized murder. Yet the eighteenth century believed it had evolved the social forms which were the highest expression of God's cosmic scheme, and which best permitted man to achieve and express the dignity inherent in his nature. Barry, in submitting to the values of his culture in an effort to become himself, ends physically deformed and spiritually corrupt. Since he is as much Everyman as is Alex, his fate is the fate of Western man.

This perception that the forms and institutions of civilization corrupt and deform man is Kubrick's alone; it is not the eighteenth century's, nor is it Thackeray's. Redmond Barry narrates his own story in Thackeray's novel, a technique which keeps the fatuous arrogance of the man always before the reader. Thackeray is not objecting to the forms of civilization as much as he is objecting to man's abuse of those forms. The man himself is the principal target of Thackeray's satire. Kubrick's use of a disinterested narrator, on the other hand, and the somewhat wooden performances he demands from the principal actors, redirects the aim of the satire. The performances of Marisa Berenson and Ryan O'Neal, especially, emphasize the extent to which cultural institutions distance the social man from his primal, vital self. The many excellent supporting roles all are directed by Kubrick to expose the darkness at the heart of every man. Leonard Rossiter as Captain Quin, for example, is barely able to control his rage when he is cut by a glass flung at his head by the

disappointed Redmond, and he is scarcely able to submerge his terror when he subsequently confronts Redmond in a duel. Man is "an ignoble savage," Kubrick has insisted. "He is irrational, brutal, weak, silly, unable to be objective about anything where his own interests are involved—that about sums it up."

This view of man, and the belief that the life-forms of Western culture do not permit man to achieve any real dignity, are most evident in the changes Kubrick has made in Thackeray's plot. The duel is the major social form which Kubrick uses to expose the false conception of human nature upon which Western civilization is structured. The movie begins and ends with duels, both invented by Kubrick: in the opening scene, Barry's father is killed in a duel, and Barry has his leg shattered in the final duel with his stepson. The duel between Barry and Captain Quin for the hand of Nora Brady is the only duel that appears in both the novel and the movie.

The final dueling scene is a masterful invention by Kubrick. In the novel, Bullingdon has gone to America to fight against the rebelling colonists. He does not return until after Barry's fortunes have been reversed. Lady Lyndon escapes the brutal Barry through the help of a former lover. To escape his creditors, Barry agrees to exile. His "luck" just winds down gradually. Thackeray invents no climactic scene to give point to the dissipated life of the hero. The message seems to be that false pride and hypocrisy will eventually destroy the man who fails to achieve a proper view of himself.

Kubrick's climactic scene is much more pointed, driving the various thematic strains he has been working with to their inevitable conclusion. The setting is an abandoned church, with pigeons (or are they mourning doves?) descending from the dark recesses of the roof's arches. Barry and Bullingdon confront each other in the nave and fire across the transept. The ritualized conduct is intended to assert the innate dignity of man, a dignity which is insisted upon by a religious ideology that Kubrick, with the abandoned church and the duel that mocks the crucifixion, finds to be empty and false. That the ritual expresses little nobility in man's character is emphasized by Bullingdon's emetic reaction to receiving Barry's shot after his own gun misfires. What is motivating Bullingdon is not the outrage to his intrinsic dignity, but his savage compulsion to destory the man who has come between him and his inheritance, and between him and his mother. When Barry's leg is shattered by Bullingdon's second shot and he screams with pain, Bullingdon himself emits an uncontrollable cry of joy, and for a fleeting moment the id expresses its ecstatic gratification upon his face. He has conquered that which was opposed to him. The finest ironic touch in the scene, however, is the doves, symbolic birds of peace, descending from the darkness above like epiphanic tongues of flame to give the lie to the conception of human character which is working itself out in the duel across the crucifix formed by the intersecting nave and transept.

The true inspiration of Western civilization is not the imitation of God's cosmic scheme, but money. Barry loses his youthful quest for his first love because he is penniless and his cousin Nora opts for a man who can bring 1500 pounds a year into the family coffers. When Barry finally does marry, he marries only for money, and, as Lord Wendover says, anybody with a yearly income of 30,000 pounds and an estate ought to be a peer. The way to a peerage is the flagrant display of wealth—saying the right things about art, appreciating the right kind of music, knowing the best people, giving extravagant entertainments. Barry almost squanders his wife's fortune in his campaign for a peerage, under the distressed but stoical eye of Graham. It is saved when Bullingdon, the champion of Christian civilization, returns to demand satisfaction for the beating Barry had given him, the beating that was not according to form. In mutilating Barry, Bullingdon makes civilization safe for Money and the Church. Symbolically, of course, he has unmanned Barry, he has spiritually castrated him.

The final scene of the movie is also Kubrick's invention. Bullingdon and his mother are reunited and are settling the debts of the estate, once again under the frozen stare of Graham and the self-satisfied and watchful gaze of Reverend Runt. It is a highly suggestive tableau. Under the

aegis of these two authorities, Capitalism and the Church, Western civilization marches its relentless way to the apocalypse of *A Clockwork Orange*. Barry, now impotent, accepts a cash compensation for his mutilation and exists with *his* mother, subdued past all further defiance.

It is not that Kubrick is suggesting the instinctual man be permitted unrestricted expression of himself, but that man recognize and acknowledge the savage in himself and develop cultural forms based upon the frank acceptance of that acknowledgment. Joseph Conrad, a writer known to Kubrick, has voiced a variant of Camus's only significant philosophical question. Stein, a character in the novel *Lord Jim*, claims that the real question is not "To be or not to be," but "How to be." He concludes, as Kubrick concludes, that man must "immerse" himself "in the destructive element," that is, man must embrace the savage in himself in order to control him. In the duel between Barry and his stepson, Barry is the true victor. Closer to his instinctual self than any other character in the story, Barry is able to control his rage and fire his pistol into the ground after Bullingdon's pistal misfires. It is true that Barry is distraught over the death of his son Bryan, but O'Neal's performance in the scene does not in any way suggest his indifference to life. Instead, he struggles to control his fear and his rage. He is thus able to stand his ground to receive Bullingdon's second shot which shatters his leg. In so doing, he achieves a dignity that Bullingdon betrays with the joyful expression of gratified rage when he hears Barry's cry of pain. Although he is deformed by his civilization, Barry has achieved the only meaningful victory in the movie, the triumph over the savage in himself. It is only a passing victory, however. Kubrick's point is clear enough: man must embrace the Alex in himself to be whole again. He must reject his past, his cultural traditions, the dead moral scheme that falsifies life and deforms, rather than controls, the instinctual man.

The charge that Kubrick's later movies are devoid of meaning is thus nonsensical. The charge that he is ponderous and dull is comprehensible only if his ideas are ponderous and dull. The evidence of his trilogy on Western civilization supports the claim that he is one of America's top film directors. He is more than that. Stanley Kubrick is a critic of his age, one of its interpreters and one of its artists.

BARRY SALT

Film Style and Technology in the Thirties

Now that some interest has arisen in the history of the influence of film technology on the forms of films, there has been an unfortunate tendency to exaggerate its importance, whereas in truth it appears that, as far as the more interesting aspects of movies are concerned, technology acts more as a loose pressure on what is done rather than a rigid constraint. For instance, one can connect the move towards faster cutting in the middle thirties with the introduction of "rubber numbering" (or "edge numbering") of the cutting copies of the sound and picture tracks, but an opposite tendency towards longer takes, which began at the end of the thirties, seems to be

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independent of any of the technical developments of the period. And a complex train of events involving aspects of sound recording and film stock development relate to the rise of background projection and total studio shooting that so distinguishes the later thirties from the early thirties.

So in this article these matters, and also other aspects of the general movement of the formal stylistic features in the mainstream cinema of the thirties, are considered in relation to the technological developments of the period. The emphasis is strongly on American practice, but the state of European developments is mentioned from time to time. The analytical approach to film style used here has already been demonstrated more fully in some respects in *Film Quarterly,* Vol. 28, No. 1, and since then extended somewhat, and the general attitude taken is that it is impossible to establish what is interesting about a particular film unless one knows the norms holding in general for other films of the same kind made at the same time and place. Ignoring this principle has led people to describe features of particular films as remarkable, when they are in fact quite commonplace in the context of their period, and although this error is much more common with early cinema, one instance in connection with sound editing can be mentioned here.

At the beginning of the thirties editors were beginning to realize the importance of what might be called the "dialogue cutting point" for making weak (i.e., smooth, un-noticeable) cuts when cutting from one speaker to another in a scene. In general the weakest cut from a speaker to the shot of his listener, who is about to reply in the succeeding shot, will be made while the last syllable of the last word of the speech is still being spoken. Some editors cut at the very end of the last syllable, which is almost equally acceptable, but virtually none cut in the middle of the pause between the two speeches, or just at the beginning of the reply. (Some uncertainty about this point is still visible in Capra's *Platinum Blonde*—1931.) Of course deviations from this point can be made for reasons of emphasis and expression in general, most notably cutting to a listener's reaction in the middle of a speech. Curiously enough this principle has never been written down in books on editing technique, and presumably it is passed on to apprentice assistants at the editor's knee, but in any case it should be immediately obvious to any would-be editor from watching a couple of films. But in a recent article by Raymond Bellour on *The Big Sleep* in *Screen,* Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 17, several lines are spent in discussing one instance of this standard dialogue cutting point as though it were something unique and remarkable rather than the usual thing.

The picture of the technology situation has been put together from information obtained from complete runs of *The American Cinematographer* and *The Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers,* together with *The Cinematographic Annual,* Vols. 1 and 2 (American Society of Cinematographers, Hollywood 1930 and 1931), *Recording Sound for Motion Pictures* (ed. Lester Cowan, McGraw-Hill, 1931) and *Motion Picture Sound Engineering* (Research Council of A.M.P.A.S., Hollywood, 1938). Some several hundred films of the period have been considered in the light of this information, and also of the present author's film-making experience at the professional level, principally as a cameraman, but extending a little way into most other areas.

DEPTH OF FIELD AND OTHER PHOTOGRAPHIC VARIABLES INFLUENCING THE FILM IMAGE

Depth of field (often erroneously called depth of focus) is one of the central factors controlling the appearance of the film image, and it is really necessary to get a clear understanding of the way it is related to other variable factors if one is to appreciate the interconnections between the visual qualities of movies and film technology. The four central quantities whose variations are strictly connected with one another are Depth of Field, Lens Aperture, Focal Length of Lens, and Lens Focus.

Depth of Field is the range of distance in front of the camera lens inside which objects produce sharp images *as seen on the cinema screen* when the film is finally projected. The boundaries of this range of sharp focus are rather approximate, as objects just outside it are only slightly unsharp,

and the casual glance at the cinema screen may not reveal this. The range of sharp focus as it appears on the ground-glass screen of a camera view-finding system is not necessarily the same as that on the cinema screen, though usually close to it.

Lens Aperture is the size of the variable opening in the iris diaphragm built into the middle of the lens. Its size is measured in "f numbers" or "stops," and these f numbers are inversely related to the actual diameter of the lens diaphragm opening. The basic series of f numbers runs f 1, f 1.4, f 2, f 2.8, f 4, f 5.6, f 8, f 11, f 16, f 22, f 32. Each of these f numbers are said to differ from the next one by "one stop," and going from one to the next either halves or doubles the amount of light passing through the lens to the film. Intermediate f numbers are also possible, and tend to occur in the specification of the maximum aperture of a lens. The exposure is controlled by changing the amount of light falling on the scene and/or changing the lens aperture so that just the amount of light gets through the lens as appropriate to the film stock being used. "Faster" film stocks require less light through the lens than "slow" stocks, and so give the cameraman the option of decreasing the light level on the set or leaving it the same and reducing the lens aperture, which can increase depth of field (see below).

Focal Length of a lens is the distance behind its "optical center" of the plane in which the image of an infinitely distant object is formed. The "angle of view" of a camera lens is inversely proportional to its focal length, so short focal length lenses have a wide angle of view, and are colloquially referred to as wide-angle lenses, and long focal length lenses, some of which also have "tele-photo" type construction, have a narrow angle of view.

There is no definite criterion for what constitutes a "standard lens," though some fairly recent experimental work suggests that for the Academy frame focal lengths between 35mm and 40mm give most viewers a feeling of correct perspective. Before World War I some cameramen regarded even a 75mm lens as standard, though in the twenties all came to agree on 50mm as standard. This more or less continued to be the case through the thirties, but by the late forties there were many who had come to regard 35mm focal length as standard. Widescreen projection in the fifties continued the trend, but also introduced complexities which it would be out of place to discuss here.

Lens Focus is of course the distance at which the lens focus is set to produce the very sharpest images of objects.

Now the value of any one of these quantities is determined by the values of the other three, but it is usual to consider the effect on the depth of field of holding two of them fixed and varying the third. The results are nowadays set down in depth of field tables, but these did not exist in the thirties, and cameramen then had to rely on experience to predict the depth of field that would appear on the screen. So, given that the other two factors are constant, depth of field increases with: (i) Increase of distance at which the lens focus is set—up to a certain point called the hyperfocal distance; this variation is of no help in achieving "deep focus." (ii) Decrease of focal length of lens—that is, moving to wider angles of lens, which at the same time introduces perspective distortion. (iii) Reduction of lens aperture. This requires the use of faster film stock and/or increase of light levels on the set. To reduce the aperture by one stop requires a doubling of the light level, and as is well known, this in turn doubles the already considerable electricity consumption of the studio. But if one was prepared to pay the price it was possible, even in the early twenties, to raise the light level on studio sets to the point where considerable depth of field was obtained even with the slow (approximately 20 ASA) film of that time. An isolated instance of this occurs in von Stroheim's *Foolish Wives* (1921), where in a few scenes the interiors have been lit to match the level of the sunlit exteriors visible through doors, etc., and consequently the lens aperture is about f 5.6 or f 8, and sharp focus is carried from Medium Shot to Very Long Shot. This is not deep focus in the post-Toland sense, but it is on the way there, and it could have been pushed further by doubling up the arc lights used, and by using a wider angle lens, if there had been a specific desire to increase depth of field further, instead of this result having been

achieved accidentally in pursuit of other ends.

FILM STOCK AND PROCESSING

At the beginning of the thirties the most commonly used negative stock continued to be Eastman Kodak panchromatic negative of the type introduced in 1928, but similar negative materials were also available from Agfa, Dupont, and Pathé. All these had slow emulsions that were used as though they had a speed of around 20 ASA in present-day terms, although there was no film speed rating system in use at that time. The faster Agfa negative which was already available, and the Eastman Supersensitive Negative which became available in 1931, were not in general use in Hollywood, except for filming the odd largish-scale night exterior. The principal reason for these negatives not being used to secure either lower light levels on the sets, or alternatively greater depth of field in the photography, was that they had noticeably greater graininess (as faster film stock usually does) and hence gave poorer defintion in the image. So photography on interiors continued to be at maximum aperture (f 2-f 2.8).

New improved duplicating negative and positive stocks were made available by Kodak in 1930 and 1933 respectively, and these were directly connected with the developments in optical printing which will be discussed below. Most important also for special effects was Eastman Background Negative introduced in 1933 in response to Hollywood's desire to employ more background projection. This negative had very fine grain, and made it possible to obtain shots whose graininess would not be evident when projected onto the new giant background projection screens. In this case the demand very definitely produced the technical development, which is not usually the case, but the causal chain can be traced back even further to the exigencies of sound recording at this period.

In 1934 Agfa-Ansco introduced their 32 ASA Superpan negative to the American market, and the next year Kodak riposted with Super X which was approximately 40 ASA. These new faster stocks had better definition than their predecessors, but the decisive innovations occurred in 1938, when Eastman Kodak introduced Plus X and Super XX with speeds equivalent to 80 ASA and 160 ASA respectively, and Agfa introduced Supreme and Ultrapan (64 ASA and 120 ASA). Of these new materials, Plus X immediately proved the most successful, for it gave definition comparable to the earlier slow stock for the first time, and in fact the vast majority of Hollywood features were shot with it for many years onwards. But in the later thirties the extra two stops of speed Plus X gave were never used to stop down by that amount from the usual maximum lens aperture, and so secure increased depth of field. On the contrary, the switch to Plux X was mainly used to economize on the light levels on the sets.*

However not quite all the speed advantage of the new stocks was absorbed in this way. To a certain extent they were over-exposed rather than being used with the light level intended for a given aperture. This over-exposure was compensating for by giving the negative reduced development, and this resulted in a flatter print, i.e., there were more middle greys in the image, and less true blacks and whites. MGM and RKO were the studios which went furthest in this direction, and all in all this practice was responsible for the distinctive pearly-grey look of many late thirties films when compared with the more contrasty films of the early thirties.

LIGHTING IN THE EARLY NINETEEN-THIRTIES

The principal lighting on studio sets during the twenties had been provided by arc lights, but these produced a humming noise when operating, and this made them useless for synchronous sound filming. By the beginning of 1930 electrical circuits to silence the hum had been devised and produced, but in most studios in that year their use was extremely limited, and most of the coverage for synch-sound shots continued to be achieved with the less intense, but silent, tungsten light sources. However Fox had already returned to the principal use of arc sources, and the result was the slightly sharper shadow and modelling to

*In 1937 typical values were 250-400 foot-candles for black and white filming and 800-1000 foot-candles for Technicolor, while in 1940 typical values were 75-150 foot-candles for black and white and 150-400 foot-candles for Technicolor.

be observed in their films of that year, when compared with those from other studios.

In 1931 all studios had returned to the free use of arcs when convenient, but the majority (80%) of lights used continued to be various types of tungsten light. This was no doubt in part to realize the worth of the investment already made in these incandescent lighting units, but also in part because cameramen had come to appreciate the unique qualities of lighting that could be achieved with some of them. This was particularly true of the various kinds of floodlights with heimispherical metal reflectors containing tungsten bulbs of up to 1 kw, which gave a much softer light than any arc floodlight. Indeed in general the light from tungsten source lighting units was softer than that from equivalent units with arc sources, and when used for figure lighting they produced attractive soft-edged shadows on the face. Some cameramen took more advantage of these possibilities than others, but Victor Milner can stand as an example of those who exploited the softness of tungsten light extensively in such films as *Ladies Man* (1931), where the key lighting is done with tungsten floodlights even in Long Shot, and the cast shadows as well as the modelling shadows are as soft as can be achieved, short of using the type of "soft light" unit only available in recent decades. Milner persisted with this approach, in the lighting of closer shots at least, for the rest of his career.

SOME THINGS DONE BY CAMERAMAN JAMES WONG HOWE

In general it is not possible to isolate a consistent individual recognizable style in the work of even the best cameramen; there is no obvious connection between the strong chiaroscuro look of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and the rather pedestrian mid-key look of *Back Street,* both photographed by Karl Freund for Universal in 1932. Nevertheless there are numerous occasions when individual cameramen achieve strikingly original results, and in the early thirties James Wong Howe stands out in this respect.

In this period James Wong Howe tried out the possibilities of using a fairly wide-angle lens (25mm) in various unusual ways. In ordinary Hollywood practice this lens was only rarely used, when the constrictions of an awkward set prevented a Long Shot being obtained in any other way, but Wong Howe used a 25mm lens on *Transatlantic* (1931) specifically to secure increased depth of field. The result was far from being deep focus in the modern, post-Toland sense, which strictly speaking means sharpness of focus from Big Close Up to Long Shot; the range achieved by Wong Howe was only from five feet to 30 feet, which is from Medium Shot to Long Shot with a 25mm lens. (These figures mean that the aperture used was approximately f 4, and the light levels would have been little more than those usual at this period.)

Less well known is that Wong Howe used a 25mm lens to get the close shots in *Viva Villa!* (1934) and also used long focal length lenses to shoot the massed battle scenes, an exceptional inversion of the usual procedures at that time.

Finally, *The Power and the Glory* (William K. Howard, 1933) contains a piece of exceptional lighting in the scenes in the tycoon's office, where Wong Howe somehow managed to duplicate exactly the fall of diffuse north light coming from windows to one side only. There is no back light or light from any other angle, and the effect is exactly what it would be in the real situation, or if using modern "soft lights" in the window positions. Ignoring a few instances involving close shots of people in other films at other times, this is the only instance the author has noted of anything before recent years that could reasonably be called "north lighting" applied to a studio scene.

It would appear that James Wong Howe was not encouraged in such individual efforts, as he did not do anything very unconventional again till the fifties; and indeed in general the later thirties and early forties were a period of conformism in all respects in films made everywhere. Directors who had a taste for experiment like William K. Howard were also not encouraged.

LIGHTING IN THE LATE THIRTIES

The important development in lighting practice in the latter part of the thirties was the introduction of a new range of spotlights with

Fresnel lenses. For the first time it was possible to have large diameter lenses (up to three feet) close in front of a powerful light source, either arc or tungsten, as well as a parabolic mirror behind the source. The efficiency of the source and its controllability were vastly increased, and these units have remained standard from that date to the present. The range available extended all the way from 500 watt tungsten spots to the biggest arc spotlights, and all had a beam spread that could be adjusted handily from 8 to 40 degrees, with a soft edge over a few degrees where the intensity fell off very rapidly to zero.

Even more completely than previously the main lighting of scenes in Hollywood movies was now executed with spotlights, and floodlighting was restricted to a certain amount of general fill lighting on sets or close-ups.

But the new Fresnel spots were slow to arrive in Europe, and even in the late thirties the main lighting of shots continued to be done with floodlights. The unavailability of big arc spots for extra figure lighting on location is quite obvious in Carné's *Quai des Brumes* (1938) and in Claude Renoir's work for his uncle, for instance. Of course satisfactory results could be obtained on the generally smaller European sets with floodlights, and indeed the look of the lighting was in the strict sense of the term more naturalistic than the American approach, but the point is just that European cameramen could not have produced exactly that Hollywood style if they had wanted to. The position in Britain was as usual intermediate.

There, with the somewhat superior equipment available, George Périnal was able to create the apotheosis of the European style in a series of Korda productions that he lit in the late thirties. The way of the best European film lighting since about 1913 had been to light the set and actors as one unit, and to apply no separate light (or very little) to produce special modelling on the actors. Périnal managed to combine an elegantly simple disposition of the major shadows on the set with glossy treatment of the figures at the appropriate moments. This creation of simple large geometrical shapes in the solid black shadows cast on the background of shots means that Périnal's lighting is probably the only work in the late thirties that can be attributed to its author without prior sight of a film's credits.

Throughout the later thirties in Hollywood photography continued to be conducted at, or near, maximum aperture and in general the faster stocks were not used to achieve smaller apertures and hence greater depth of field. This was also true of European practices. (For the last time, there is *no* true "deep focus" in Renoir's films, just staging in depth, sometimes beyond the limits of sharp focus.)

CAMERA LENSES

At the beginning of the thirties lenses with focal lengths from 25mm upwards were available as before, and were used, and the usual maximum aperture of wide-angle and standard lenses was around f 2.5, though the Taylor-Hobson series had a maximum aperture of f 2. The importance of the maximum aperture of the lenses commonly used, apart from its relation to depth of field as already indicated, stems from the continuing desire of film-makers to use lens diffusion ("soft focus") in varying degrees throughout films. It does not seem to be generally known that the aesthetic convention of "soft focus" in cinematography stems from its use in still photography in the early years of this century. By 1914 still cameras with special "soft focus" lenses were being mass-produced for amateur use, and around 1915 "soft focus" Close-Ups began to appear in American movies. (But *not* those of D. W. Griffith.) The extensive use of lens diffusion, especially but not only in close-ups, had become common by 1925, and since lens diffusion, whether it is carried out with gauzes, vaseline plates, or specially made lenses, is most effective at maximum lens aperture, so photography at, or near, maximum lens aperture had become usual by that time.

The practice of maximum aperture photography thus has nothing to do with the introduction of panchromatic film a year or two later, contrary to what is often claimed in discussions of the development of deep-focus cinematography. The further reduction in depth of field visible in early sound films is largely due to quite another cause. The simultaneous use of several camera booths in filming scenes on many sound films

made in 1928, 1929, and to some extent into 1930, forced the use of longer focal length lenses to get tighter-frame, apparently closer shots than was the case both before and after. For instance, in the years mentioned a Medium Shot would quite probably be taken with a 75mm lens rather than the usual 50mm lens, and consequently the depth of field was even further reduced, becoming so shallow that everything but the actor was conspicuously out of focus. With the appearance of blimped cameras it was of course once more possible to get the camera, fitted with any lens, as close as one liked to the actors, so the extreme of shallowness of field disappeared again.

As a further complication, around 1929 and 1930 there was a minor school of thought in the studios which considered that lens diffusion should be dropped entirely as the "realism" added by synchronous sound demanded that everything in the image be sharply visible. This idea had a limited and passing influence, but may have been responsible for such peculiarities as the absence of lens diffusion throughout all the close shots of King Vidor's *Hallelujah* (1929), and nearly all other shots too, but on a couple of Very Long Shots heavy diffusion is used—remarkable inversion of the standard procedures.

Once into the thirties, sets were being designed on the assumption that the Long Shots would be taken with a 40mm lens. For closer shots a 50mm lens was once more the usual choice, and of course for Close-Ups something like 75mm.

In 1932 the Taylor-Hobson "Varo" variable focal length lens became available, and had occasional limited use in Hollywood for a few years. (The term "zoom lens" had not yet been coined.) The focal length of this lens could be continuously varied between 40mm and 120mm, with a possible maximum aperture of f 5.6. Apart from the rather small maximum aperture, the drawback of this lens was the fact that the focus was fixed at the hyperfocal distance, and closer objects had to be focussed by putting supplementary lenses in front of the front element, so focus-pulling in the middle of the shot was impossible. A further drawback was that the lens casing was a large and heavy oblong metal box about half the size of the body of a Mitchell camera. Zoom shots made with the Varo lens can be seen in the street scene opening of *Love Me Tonight* (Mamoulian, 1932) and also in the stag-hunting scene. It was also used in a number of other films at this time, but hardly ever in later years, although it continued to be available, and the last use I have detected was in a montage sequence of *Private Worlds* (LaCava, 1935).

CAMERAS

In 1930 Warners were the only studio still using the "ice-box" type of sound-proof booth containing both camera and operator for sound filming, and from 1931 all the studios were using Mitchell NC cameras in blimps of their own various hand-made designs. So although Warners had fitted some of their booths with wheels, as had other studios during 1929, there was still during 1930 at that studio a strict limitation on the use of panning simultaneously with tracking, a limitation that no longer obtained elsewhere. (Cameras inside sound-proof booths were naturally limited by the size of the booth window to pans of about 30 degrees on either side of the forward direction, whereas both unblimped and blimped cameras can obviously be pointed in any direction while the dolly they are mounted on is being tracked along.)

The prototype Mitchell BNC was produced in 1934, but this camera was not put into series production till 1938. However Gregg Toland acquired and used one of the prototypes years before it was put on sale, but with no visible effect on the style of his camerawork at this point. In 1935 another silent camera was designed for Twentieth Century-Fox, and in 1939 several were produced for the sole use of that studio, but further production was prevented by the precision engineering requirements of World War II. Both the Fox camera and the Mitchell BNC were slightly easier than earlier cameras to get into extreme positions, and slightly easier to use in general, but this really had little significance as far as studio filming was concerned. What *was* important was that synch-sound shooting with lenses of wider angle than 25mm was now possible. (Blimped cameras had been restricted to using lenses of focal length longer than 25mm) However the effect of this was not to be realized till the forties.

CAMERA SUPPORTS AND CAMERA MOBILITY

Most of the major studios had acquired large camera cranes in imitation of Universal, and small cranes with a rise and fall of several feet appeared at Paramount in 1933, and at other studios shortly after. Naturally the improvised steerable dollies which were already in use for sound shooting continued to be used. On these the blimped camera was mounted on a heavy-duty tripod whose feet were fastened to the dolly platform. The pan and tilt head used under the blimped cameras was of the heavy spring-loaded friction type controlled with a pan bar, just like the still existing Mitchell and Vinten types. In 1930 Mole-Richardson had produced a large cradle geared head like the current types, having much faster and smoother pan and tilt movements than the small silent-period geared heads, but for some unknown reason this was not used till the end of the thirties.

Although tracking shots with synch-sound appear in a number of films made in 1929, for instance *The Saturday Night Kid and The Virginian,* not to mention the well-publicized instance of *Applause,* it must be realized that these are all instances of *parallel* tracking shots, in which the camera moves on a straight path with the actors, and without any large panning movements, for of course the camera and operator were inside wheeled booths, as already mentioned. However there were some films made in 1928 and 1929 which do show free panning and tilting on tracking shots; films such as *Hearts in Dixie* (1928) and *Chinatown Nights* (Wellman, 1929). But in these cases the shots in question were taken with an unblimped wild camera, and the sound laid under the shot in the editing. In fact the latter film appears to be a rare case of an entirely post-synchronized Hollywood film made in 1929.

Once the blimped cameras were on friction heads and dollies, the way was open to a complete continuation of the extensive use of the mobile camera that had characterized the work of many directors at the end of the silent period. At the beginning of the thirties obvious names like Pabst and Milestone spring to mind, but this very conscious trend spread to many directors, including newcomers like George Cukor and John Cromwell (as commented on by the latter at the National Film Theatre, London, in 1974).

The prototype of a small, extremely maneuverable dolly was used on Milestone's *The Front Page* in 1931, and this dolly was put into series production in 1932 as the Bell & Howell "Rotambulator." It had a camera mounting that could rise and fall beside a central column, and this column was fixed in turn to a circular base about three feet in diameter. There were three small wheels around the circumference of the base, two at the front with fixed direction, and one at the back that was steerable. This arrangement permitted very tight turns to be executed, and the Rotambulator's maneuverability (but not its stability) approached that of present crab dollies. The effect of its use can be seen in the press room scenes of *The Front Page.*

The Hollywood extreme of the "long take with mobile camera" style can be represented by John Stahl's *Back Street* (1932), which with an Average Shot Length (A.S.L.) of 23 seconds inevitably includes a fair number of takes that are minutes long. (The roughly Poisson-type distribution of shot lengths in mainstream feature films enables one to know very roughly how many shots there will be of any given length in a movie once one knows the A.S.L. and the total duration of the film (see *Film Quarterly,* Vol. 28 No. 1, 1974).

In the instance quoted, and in others as Pabst's *Kameradschaft,* this style tends to be associated with a push towards naturalism in other dimensions of the medium such as dialogue and acting. The connection is not absolute, as witness the rather stylized acting in Renoir's *Boudu Sauvé des Eaux* (1932), which has an A.S.L. of 15 seconds, but nothing much in the way of tracking shots.

None of the dollies or cranes that became available in this period permitted minimum lens heights much below three feet, and ultra-low camera angles continued to require special time-consuming measures; nevertheless they continue to make their appearance in a few films such as *Doorway to Hell* (Archie Mayo, 1930) and others, the inspiration presumably being various European films such as *Battleship Potemkin* which had arrived in America right at the end of the

twenties. Unmotivated high angle shots are slightly more frequent, though still not common in non-musical films. A good place to study the use of these, and other, expressivist or "expressionist" devices at the Hollywood extreme of the expressivist-naturalist spectrum is *The Bat Whispers* (Roland West, 1931).

BACKGROUND PROJECTION

From 1930 the earlier travelling matte systems (Williams and Dunning processes) for combining live-action foreground scenes with separately filmed live-action background scenes were abandoned entirely, and replaced with background projection. In this latter process a previously filmed background scene is projected in the studio onto a large translucent screen from behind, while the actors are filmed from the front of it, acting against the image on the screen to produce a combined image giving the illusion that they are actually in the location shown in the background. The very first background projection screens were made of ground glass, and were limited in height to several feet. They were also prone to show a "hot-spot"; that is, the part of the image near their center photographed brighter than the parts at the edges. Attempts to use other materials to make large screens had other drawbacks, as can be seen in *The Dawn Patrol* (1930). Here very large screens, presumably made of some thin white cloth, were used in the final ground scenes showing the bombing of the German factory. The image of the distant parts of the bombed factory back projected onto the screen are partially obscured with an all-over wash of white, either from the screen material itself, or from flare in the optical system of the projector. The result is a glaringly unconvincing mismatch between the background and the actors and parts of set built in front of the screen. Earlier in the film close shots of pilots in aeroplanes made in front of smaller back projection screens are satisfactory because the effect is less marked, and also because one expects aerial haze to wash out the background in the real situation being mimicked.

Because of these flaws, background projection was limited to showing things like the passing street through the back window of cars, where small screen size does not matter, until a new cellulose screen material and redesign of the optics of background projectors in 1932 made possible satisfactory projection on screens as big as 17 feet by 23 feet.

The new possibilities of background projection after that date can be studied with advantage in *King Kong* (1933), where all the combination of animated models with live action is achieved by background projection, often with the new large screens, though it would appear that the new fine grain background negative stock was not available when the film was shot. (It must be emphasized that in this film some of the combination of actions in *different* parts of the frame is achieved with the much older fixed matte procedures. Also in one or two shots the silhouettes of birds flying past are made by simple superimposition.)

As a result of the unavailability of good background projection during the early thirties, many films continued to include synch-sound location dialogue sequences, some of them quite lengthy, whereas after 1933 such scenes are very rare. Naturally the point about shooting what purport to be exterior dialogue scenes in front of the background projection screen is that it gives total control over the environment—lighting, weather, and background noise—and hence more efficient production. The reduction of background noise was particularly important given the microphones available in the thirties.

OPTICAL PRINTING

Optical (or projection) printers involve the frame-by-frame projection of an already shot film through a system of lenses and the frame-by-frame refilming of all or part of the projected image with an accurately aligned camera. In the twenties there were one or two specialist firms in Hollywood that had their own hand-built optical printers, to which the studios sometimes contracted out special effects, but the lack of satisfactory duplicating negative and positive stocks restricted the use of such printers. When duplicating negative and positive film with fine grain and low contrastiness become available at the beginning of the thirties, this permitted combinations of shots to be made in optical

printers and then re-copied with hardly any noticeable deterioration in quality, which had not been the case before. Series-built optical printers were made and sold by such firms as DePue from 1930, and with these, or others constructed by their own technicians, the studios set up their own optical printing departments. Immediately such effects as front titles printed over live action at the beginning of films started to appear, followed by the wipe as a shot transition from 1931. (Various approximations to the wipe had been occasionally tried from 1918, but it was impossible to make an in-the-camera wipe accurately at every attempt.) The first wipes were straight-line replacement wipes with hard edges, but other shapes were flirted with, and the edge of the wipe line rapidly became slightly blurred. The availability of optical printers and duplicating stocks also encouraged the proliferation of "montage" sequences with a faster flow of shots than had been the case in the late twenties. In fact there was close to a qualitative change in the typical montage sequence: from a series of short shots linked by dissolves to a continuous series of dissolves end-to-end giving the effect of a continuously changing superimposition. Such an effect was of course impossible to create in the camera, as the late silent-period montage sequences were created.

In the late thirties there were virtually no new developments in this area in America; one should note only an imperfectly successful attempt at travelling mattes in the "Bojangles" scene of *Swing Time* (Stevens, 1936). In Europe optical printers came into use in 1934-35, but the montage sequence never became as widely used as in the United States, possibly partly because the studios tended to contract their processing out, and did not maintain their own optical effects departments, and hence the use of montage sequences was relatively more expensive.

The wipe continued to be used more and more to indicate a short time lapse, and its edge got more and more blurred.

EDITING

The basic tool for sound editing had already been introduced at the beginning of sound film-making, and this was the multiple synchronizer just as we know it today in its unadorned form without track reading heads. Originally its purpose had been to keep the several simultaneous picture tracks obtained from multiple camera filming in synchronism with each other during editing, and hence finally with the sound-track disc, but by 1930 both multiple camera filming and sound on disc were abandoned. The synchronizer was then used just to manipulate the series of pairs of picture track and sound-on-film track, and keep them in synchronism during editing. This simple procedure gave no way of hearing the words on the soundtrack, was extremely inefficient, and was not conducive to scene dissection into a large number of shots.

But in 1930 the sound Moviola became available, and from 1931 the Average Shot Lengths in Hollywood films started to drop. The sound Moviola was a simple adaption of the silent Moviola, with a continuously moving sprocket drive pulling the sound-track film under a photoelectric sound head identical to that in a sound projector, the whole unit being mounted beside the standard Moviola picture head, and driven from it in synchronism by a rigid shaft drive. Basically the machine was the same as the present "Hollywood" Moviola, except that the picture was viewed through a magnifying lens, and not back-projected on to a tiny screen. The sound track could be moved slowly by hand under the sound head, and the exact position of any part of a sound identified.

The other development that facilitated the fast cutting (in both senses) of synch-sound shots occurred in 1932, with the introduction of "rubber numbering" (or "edge numbering") for sound and picture tracks. "Rubber numbers" are footage numbers stamped in ink down the outer edge of the picture and soundtrack for each shot. The numbers coincide at the points on the sound track and picture track where the corresponding image and its sound lie. After numbering has been carried out it is possible to shuffle about sections of picture and sound-track in the editing process with perfect freedom, secure in the knowledge that synchronism can be regained when necessary, purely "by the numbers."

As a result of the freedom provided by both these developments, the Average Shot Length in

films of this period started to decrease in a way that can be exemplified by the work of William Wellman; *The Public Enemy* (1931) has an A.S.L. of 9 seconds, *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933) has an A.S.L. of 6.5 seconds, and Wellman stayed remarkably close to this latter figure for the rest of his career. Particular advantage of the possibility of speeding up the cutting rate was taken at the Warner Brothers Studio, and this effect can also be seen in Michael Curtiz's films, but the pressure was not absolute, as can be seen from the work of Mervyn Leroy who stayed with a slower speed (*Tugboat Annie*, 1933, A.S.L. 9 seconds) and some camera movement. (It is obviously difficult, though not impossible, to use camera movement in a large number of shots when the A.S.L. gets down to around 6 seconds.) The other extreme of cutting speed, which was commoner in 1930 than 1933, can be represented by John Stahl's *Only Yesterday* (1933), which has an A.S.L. of 14 seconds.

The trend towards faster cutting in many films in the middle thirties can be easily explained as a desire on the part of many people to return to the sort of cutting that had been usual in the majority of American silent films made in the late twenties, when Average Shot Lengths were usually down around 5 seconds. And once the restrictions on cutting sound had been removed by the sound Moviola and rubber numbering, they were free to return towards silent cutting speeds as far as the length of the average line of dialogue would let them. Then after some years of that sort of thing, many directors were ready for a new fashion which appeared, and which will now be discussed.

It was only in the middle thirties that the technical developments in editing procedures introduced prior to 1933 had their full effect. For the period 1934-1939 the mean Average Shot Length for Hollywood movies was around 8-9 seconds. (This figure has been derived from a fairly random collection of over 50 films. Although there are not enough results to make a year-by-year estimate of the mean figure, it is fairly clear that the minimum was achieved round 1935. This means that most directors were taking advantage of the ease of making a large number of cuts in a scene, but there was still a wide spread of characteristic Average Shot Lengths from director to director.) But by 1939 a new tendency in the opposite direction was just beginning to appear, a tendency towards long takes that only became fully developed in the forties.

To give some examples, George Cukor moved from A.S.L.s such as 17 sec. for *Dinner at Eight* (1933) to an A.S.L. of 10 sec. in 1935 for *Sylvia Scarlett*, and then back to long takes for *Holiday* (1938) (A.S.L. of 14 sec.) and *The Women* (1939) (A.S.L. of 13 sec.) and subsequent films. Obviously this sort of movement with the trend was the most common (e.g., Wyler, Hawks), but there were also a number of directors who stuck with what they were doing at the fast cutting end of the spectrum. For example, Curtiz had already arrived at an A.S.L. of around 7 seconds in the early thirties, and he continued right through with the later thirties and into the forties in the same way: *Charge of the Light Brigade*, (1936) has an A.S.L. of 7.5 sec. and *Dodge City* (1939) has an A.S.L. of 7 sec.

On the other hand it was possible to go against the tide, as John Stahl quite remarkably did. From an A.S.L. of 13 seconds in *Imitation of Life* in 1934 he went on to use even longer takes in *Magnificent Obsession* (1935) which has many shots some minutes long, and an Average Shot Length of 26 seconds. Even more remarkably, these long scenes are mostly carried out in "profile two-shot," with two performers facing each other, and there is very little staging in depth in the manner used in Europe by Renoir, and to a lesser extent Marcel Carné and others who used long takes. But none went to such lengths in this period as Stahl did. However by 1939 Stahl had retreated from this extreme position (*When Tomorrow Comes* has an A.S.L. of 14 seconds), and by the forties he was working near the norm for those years.

It might be thought that Average Shot Lengths are related to the genre of the films concerned, and not specific to the directors, but this is only so to an extremely limited extent. The only important cases so far discovered after checking several hundred are those of the musical, where if one includes the musical numbers in the count, there is a definite tendency for a director to use

longer takes than he would otherwise. This conclusion is of course dependent on the assumption that the way the musical numbers were shot was controlled by the named director, which probably is not always the case. Another rare instance of the genre of a film dominating the way it is shot is that of the Tarzan films. Here the necessity of faking all the animal stuff ensured that the A.S.L. was always close to 4 seconds, from the thirties through to the fifties, regardless of who directed the films. Regular Tarzan directors such as Richard Thorpe never used such fast cutting on their later films.

On the other hand one finds consistency of Average Shot Length from comedies to dramas to action subjects in the work of directors such as Hawks and Wyler and so on throughout this (and other) periods.

SOUND RECORDING

1930 saw the final triumph of sound-on-film recording; sound on disc was phased out. Starting at the beginning of the sound recording chain, we note that the microphones used continued to be of the "condenser" (capacitance) type. If several microphones were being used to record sound for a shot, their signals were mixed directly before being recorded photographically on the sound negative in the sound camera, in electrical synchronism with the film camera. The mixing of a set of film sound tracks subsequent to their intial recording to give a final combined recording was very rare at the beginning of the thirties; the extra film recording stage introduced a perceptible loss of quality. (This loss of sound quality can be studied in those Laurel and Hardy films from 1931-32 which have continuous background music mixed with the dialogue and effects.) Thus, although post-synchronization of voices to a film scene could be carried out from 1929, it was mostly not used in the early thirties, and location scenes involving dialogue were always shot with direct sound, which naturally ensured that both the voices *and* all the effects went into the right place. This was extremely difficult to do in one pass when post-synchronizing without re-mixing and re-recording.

In some location situations ultra-directional microphones were created by putting an ordinary microphone at the focus of a large (up to 6 ft.) parabolic metal reflector. In this way *fairly* good recordings could be obtained at 15 ft. or more from the actors. Since otherwise all the microphones in use were omnidirectional, picking up sounds equally whatever direction they came from, background noise could be a serious problem with location recording, and this was one of the pressures encouraging the change to the shooting of "exterior" dialogue scenes in the studio as soon as good background projection made this possible.

Throughout the thirties there were more or less continuous improvements in the performance of sound-on-film recording systems through attention to various aspects of their functioning: exposure and development control of the sound track negative, amplifier circuit improvements, mechanical refinements of the sound cameras and printers, and so on. But the really audible advance in the quality of recording was largely due to the track noise suppression techniques introduced in 1931.

By 1933 it was possible to mix a separately recorded music track with the synchronous dialogue track recording after the editing stage without audible loss of sound quality at the extra film recording stage, and from this point on "background music" came to be used more and more extensively. (Up to 1932 there was, roughly speaking, either dialogue *or* music on the sound track, but never both together unless they had been recorded simultaneously. Which they sometimes were.) As the kind of improvements already mentioned continued into the late thirties, including then the important introduction of "push-pull" double sound tracks in the RCA system, it became possible to do multiple-channel music recording on *One Hundred Men and a Girl* (Henry Koster, 1938) and other subsequent musical films.

Putting the situation in another way, there was now full freedom to assemble as complicated sound tracks as could be desired, going through several recording stages if that was necessary.

TECHNICOLOR

The Technicolor three-strip camera was to a certain extent modelled on the Mitchell, and was not all that much larger, except that the magazine was three times as wide to accommodate the three rolls of negative side by side. Unlike the Mitchell cameras there was no rack-over arrangement for rapid "through the lens" viewing of the image, and focusing had to be done entirely by the scale on the lens. The larger reliance on the supplementary viewfinder so caused may have produced a tendency to less precisely composed images in Technicolor when compared with the best black and white photography of the late thirties and forties.

Because of the prism block between the back element of the lens and the film gates, ordinary lenses could not be used in the Technicolor camera, and a special set was designed and made by Taylor-Hobson Ltd., but it included no wide angle or very long focal length lenses. Technicolor photography in the studio was carried out at, or near, maximum aperture by necessity, for in the initial period up to 1937 negatives were slower than twenties black-and-white negative, and the key-light level needed for correct exposure was very high. But in 1939 new negative stock was introduced (it was used on *Gone With the Wind*) and this stock was two to four times faster than the earlier material, being considered to have a speed equal to Super X (40 ASA). But even with this improvement, the speed of the film was not great enough, when taken in conjunction with the unavailability of wide-angle lenses for Technicolor cameras, to permit any sort of Toland-style deep-focus on Technicolor films made in the forties.

Flood lights were used rather more for Technicolor lighting than they were in the late thirties for black-and-white filming, which made for flatter lighting, and this fitted in with the usual desire of producers and the Technicolor organization to show as much color as possible in each image. The use of a fair amount of strong chiaroscuro, as in *The Garden of Allah* (1936), seems to have been discouraged, and on the other hand the strikingly modern simplicity of the lighting of *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine,* done by W. Howard Greene with only a few lights per scene, was not popular either.

A frequent feature of lighting for Technicolor, which persisted for decades, first appeared in *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939) as lit by Sol Polito and W. Howard Greene. This was the practice of splashing areas of amber light and blue light on the backgrounds of "period" interior scenes without regard for any consistency with possible sources, the actors being lit with white light.

In 1937 the Technicolor process was capable of quite accurate reproduction of colours on natural exterior scenes, the true gauge of performance, as can be seen from original prints of *Ebb Tide,* for instance. Initially the system was extremely contrasty, roughly comparable in this respect to present (1976) broadcast-quality color video, the unfill-lighted shadows were solid black, and very bright areas such as white clouds had a tendency to burn out (i.e., become undifferentiated transparent areas on the positive print). However with the advent of the new camera negatives in 1939 this contrastiness was somewhat reduced. As far as faithfulness of color reproduction is concerned, it must be noted that for a couple of years, starting in 1937 and ending in 1939, it was the usual practice to make Technicolor prints with an overemphasis in the direction of orange, and such prints do not provide a true idea of the fidelity that the system was capable of at that time. (Further warning: A number of early Technicolor films such as *Becky Sharp* and *A Star Is Born* were later reissued in two-color Cinecolor prints, and these have very little relation at all to the color, definition, and contrast of the original prints.)

Because the light level on a background projection screen has to match the light level of the scene being filmed in front of it, the large light levels required for Technicolor before 1939 prevented the use of big BP screens, the upper limit being about ten feet. After 1939 the problem was minimized by the faster stock then available, and also by the development of triple background projectors at Paramount and Warners—the images from three projectors perfectly superimposed on one screen to give three times the screen brightness. But this restriction on background

projection may have contributed to the large amount of location shooting in many of the Technicolor films of this period when compared with the usual practice in black-and-white filming in the late thirties.

Although the basic Technicolor camera was not much bigger and heavier than a Mitchell NC, the blimp for the Technicolor cameras was much bigger and heavier than the usual blimps made for Mitchell cameras. (Its dimensions were about two feet by three feet by three feet.) It might be speculated that this bulk and weight militated against using the larger number of camera set-ups that were required by the shorter end of the Hollywood A.S.L. range. Certainly Wellman's *A Star Is Born* (1937) has an A.S.L. of 9.5 seconds compared with his habitual 5 to 6 seconds, and Henry Hathaway, who also worked in the same range in his black-and-white films, went up to a slower cutting (A.S.L. of 7 seconds) in *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine.* It is doubtful if this effect extended to a pressure on those directors working near the mean Average Shot Length; Ford's *Drums Along the Mohawk* has an A.S.L. of 9.5 seconds, which is quite close enough to his usual black-and-white figure of 9 seconds.

NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION

The early thirties were a period when the brightest spirits were very active in trying out new devices for narrative construction in the mainstream sound cinema, and most of the instances are well known. Nevertheless for the sake of completeness we must mention such features as depend on the use and existence of a sound track as the internal monologue in Hitchcock's *Murder* (1930), the visual illustration of speeches continued on sound only in Fritz Lang's *M* (1931), the subjective camera sequence opening Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1932), and the jump cuts given continuity by dialogue continuing across them in Clair's *A Nous La Liberté* (1932). Less well known is the narration of *The Power and the Glory* (W. K. Howard, 1933) through a series of nonchronologically arranged flashbacks, and even more remarkably, in one flashback as the narrator quotes the dialogue used on the past occasion visually represented, his words coincide with the lip movements of the characters in the flashback so that he speaks their dialogue for them. Possibly the first occasion when the audience was addressed directly in a sound film was at the end of *Big Boy* (Alan Crosland, 1930), at which point the camera pulled back to reveal that what had seemed an ordinary film to that point was taking place on a theater stage. More importantly there are of course the asides to the audience in Lubitsch's *The Smiling Lieutenant* (1931) and *Love Me Tonight* (1932).

Finally one must also mention the use of zip pans as a transitional device to indicate time lapse in *The Trial of Vivian Ware* (William K. Howard, 1934).

The later thirties were the cinema's most restricted and restrictive period, and although as already indicated films continued to occupy a large range in most of the major formal dimensions of the medium, there was very little indeed going on at the innovative extremes. Even documentary films, which had to a certain extent taken the place of the by then nonexistent avant-garde, were rather timid in the main, and one cannot point to much more than the rhythmic sound-and-poetry tracks of Cavalcanti's *Coal Face* (1935) and its successors, and the peculiarities of Dziga-Vertov's *Three Songs about Lenin* (1934). In feature films Dovzhenko's *Aerograd* (1935), with its interjected choral songs illustrated on the picture track, springs to mind, but otherwise one is left with a very few individual cases such as the innovative games played with the medium in Sacha Guitry's *Roman d'un Tricheur* (1936).

Overall, one can say that the very general trend in the early thirties in mainstream cinema was back to the style of the last silent films, 1928 vintage, as soon as the various technological constraints on putting a film together were relieved. Having reached this point about 1934-35, new technical developments began to have some effect on film photography, and at the end of the thirties a new trend towards longer takes was just starting to emerge independently of any technological pressures—a trend that was to flourish in the forties.

JULIANNE BURTON

The Hour of the Embers:

ON THE CURRENT SITUATION OF LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA

It is no longer a profanation of Art to assert that political conditions influence creative expression by defining the range of acceptable discourse and by determining who has access to what means of expression. The history of the New Latin American Cinema movement verifies the hypothesis. The revolutionary optimism of the sixties was accompanied in the closing years of the decade by an unprecedented cinematic offensive. *Antonio das Mortes,* Glauber Rocha's allegory of the Brazilian Northeast, coincided with the epic underground documentary from Argentina, *The Hour of the Furnaces.* A group of Bolivian film-makers took their cameras to the Andean highlands to film *Blood of the Condor.* Miguel Littín's *The Jackal of Nahueltoro,* a documentary-style reconstruction of the crime and punishment of an illiterate peasant, broke Chilean box-office records much as *Blood of the Condor's* denunciation of forced sterilization did in Bolivia. Cuba produced the complex and compelling *Memories of Underdevelopment* and, months later, *Lucía.*

Despite variations in form, style, and method, these films shared a common genesis and a common goal. Deeply rooted in the needs and aspirations of their own people, they were determined to preserve and cultivate their countries' cultural heritage and to reinforce it against deforming cultural exports from the developed world. Such simultaneity was no coincidence; it was the product of common conditions which generated a similar awareness and sparked a parallel response.

As Brazilian film-maker Leon Hirszman has observed, militant cinema is to a large degree "permitted" cinema; its survival depends on a commitment, however *pro forma,* to bourgeois democracy. In the decade since the movement originated, social and economic conditions have perceptibly worsened, and the cracks in the political structure which allowed such subversive works to spring up have nearly everywhere been cemented over.

Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, all seedbeds for the once-flourishing New Cinema movement, are now under the heel of the same implacable dictatorship that a country like Paraguay has borne without interruption for decades. In Brazil, all civil liberties were eradicated in 1968 by Institutional Act Number Five. "Progressive" inclinations among certain Bolivian military rulers were put to rout when General Banzer assumed power in 1971. Chilean aspirations to the peaceful implementation of socialism met with a vicious and bloody end in the fall of 1973. Argentina's flirtation with democratic forms was to prolong itself until March of this year, though a slow and unrelenting strangulation of conscientious creativity had been apparent since Perón's return to power. Only Colombia and Venezuela retain the trappings of democratic government, though especially in Colombia with its 20-year long state of siege, the trappings convince few. Peru is the special case: a self-proclaimed socialist military regime which actively courts Western investment capital while it purports to "socialize" private profit.

Not surprisingly, it is only in these latter three countries that the New Latin American Cinema survives, or struggles to survive, as a movement rather than a series of isolated efforts. Given the continuing level of repression, no film activity remains in Chile. Sanjinés and his original group have been expelled from Bolivia. In Argentina and Brazil, long-established film industries offer potential shelter for militant film-makers, but on the industries' own terms. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela aspire to create national film industries,

Argentina: THE HOUR OF THE FURNACES
(Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino)

but official favoritism toward commercial interests splits groups of militant film-makers and puts them on the defensive. Only in Cuba is revolutionary cinema alive and well, but that is another story . . .

COLOMBIA: PALACE FILM-MAKERS, PROFIT-MONGERS, AND INDEPENDENTS

At the risk of reinforcing predictable stereotypes, I can't resist stating that my film research in Latin America began with a bang. Firebomb explosions in four major Bogotá theaters coincided with my arrival in Colombia. The Colombian media preferred to sensationalize the incident rather than draw any conclusions from it, but the fact is that all four theaters were associated in name or in deed with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, the largest distributor-exhibitor in Colombia. *Jaws* (*Tiburón* in Spanish) just happened to be playing at three of the targeted theaters, *Tommy* at the fourth. In all four cases, damage was to property, not to people. The incident testifies to the fact that in Latin America culture has entered the political arena. To the eyes of a growing number of Latin Americans, behind Hollywood's "pure entertainment" mask, there's an agent of cultural and political domination lurking.

Though Colombia, as the third largest film consumer in Latin America, continues to offer a substantial market for Hollywood imports, elements of the official culture-hierarchy are convinced that 1975 marks the "take-off" of a national film industry. To demonstrate the fact, they organized the First Festival of National Cinema in March of this year. Concerted attempts on the part of the government to stimulate national film-making date back to the film law of 1942. A 1971 law, extended in 1974, decreed obligatory exhibition of Colombian shorts at first-run theaters, raised admission prices, established a system of rebates to producers and distributors, and set up a government-appointed Film Quality Advisory Board to determine which films are fit for public consumption. (Censorship of content is the province of yet another advisory board—"advisory," it must be noted, to the government, not to the film-makers.) The particular species of film which this law has spawned is popularly called *el cine de sobre-precio,* or "surcharge cinema." In its attempt to generate national cinema by ensuring profitability, the law has, not surprisingly, attracted many who are less interested in cinema than in profit. By appropriating the social themes of their more politically committed rivals, many officially sponsored film-makers are able to capitalize on the success of militant cinema while mystifying its themes in order to reduce or coopt their potential impact.

Approximately 100 short films, three quarters of them documentaries, were produced in 1975. The most renowned example to date of surcharge cinema is *Corralejas in Sincelejo* by Mario Mitriotti and Ciro Durán, though some assert that its fame is not so much motivated by its inherent interest as by the fact that it was paired for distribution with *The Exorcist.* (This in turn is reputed to be the result of a deal between the film-makers and the distributors; the former relinquished their share of the profits in order to secure such an advantageous match.) *Corralejas* is typical of surcharge cinema in the convenient compromise it makes between social critique and travelogue. Its subject is both "national" and "popular." The *Corralejas* are a ritual festival in remote Sincelejo where drunken peasants are herded into a corral to become targets of the even more drunken landowners. Characteristically, the film is complacent in its denunciation of these barbarous rites, opting for sensationalism rather than any exploration of the roots of the phenomenon.

Francisco Norden, whose credentials include the London Polytechnical School and IDHEC in Paris, is part of a select group of film-makers who did not have to wait for surcharge cinema to get a corner on production. Norden, whose wife Isadora runs Bogotá's Cinemateca Distrital and is a leading official in the national ministry of culture, has been turning out glossy picture-postcards (*The Walls of Cartagena, The Balconies of Cartagena, The Route of the Liberators*) since the early sixties. A tour of the incomparable Gold Museum in the Banco Nacional includes a screening of his *The Legend of El Dorado,* a pretentious historical mystification of the Spaniards' quest for the beautifully wrought artifacts fashioned by indigenous goldsmiths.

With *Camilo Torres* (1975), his first full-length documentary, soon to be in US distribution, Norden moves his historical mystifications onto the contemporary stage. The martyrdom of this class-privileged priest-turned-guerrilla convulsed Colombia much as Che Guevara's death, achieved by the same alliance between national armed forces and their US "advisors," would convulse the continent a few months later. Norden supplements the static interviews which make up the bulk of the film with family photographs and historical documentary footage. That this is an "official" version is indicated by who is excluded from as well as by who in included in the picture. The class background of the film's main interlocutors (the current president, the ex-dictator, Catholic hierarchs, lawyers, politicians), not to mention the style and composition of the interviews, reinforces the same established hierarchies which Camilo sought to bring down. Camilo's work among urban workers and the peasantry, as well as his own writings, are obvious sources for one who aspires to an informed account, but Norden leaves them untapped. Camilo's entire political trajectory is dismissed

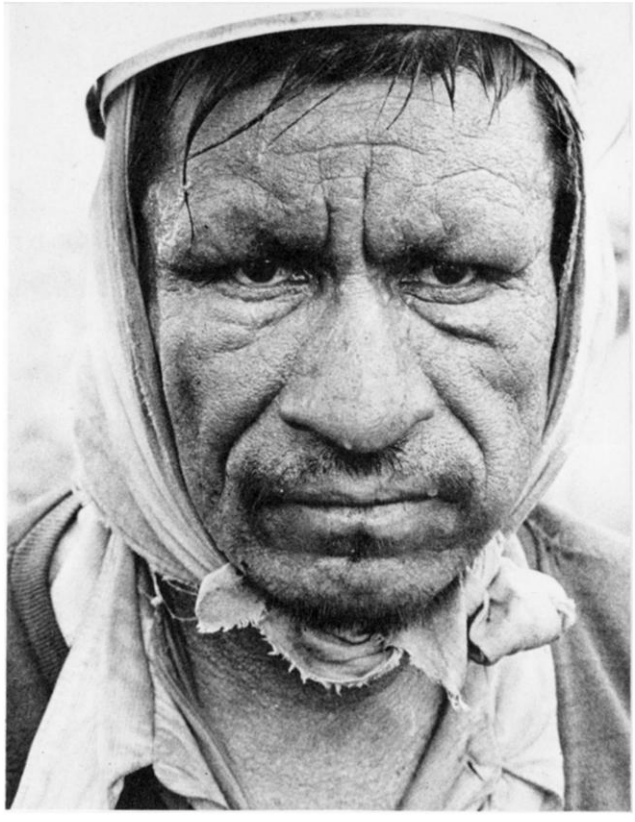
as an oedipal aberration: his radicalization was but a misdirected rebellion against a domineering mother. At one point in the film, Camilo's portly brother, temporarily back from the United States where he resides (how aptly he evokes all that Camilo chose not be become), observes that Camilo's enemies in life have become his intimates in death. It is a fitting epigram for the film. Camilo Torres has been officially eulogized, analyzed, sanitized—in short, assimilated.

Two groups of independent film-makers stand in opposition to the palace film-makers and surcharge cineastes. Marta Rodriguez, trained as an anthropologist, and photographer Jorge Silva are film artisans who have no interest in the industrial mode of production on which film-makers of other sectors and convictions depend. The methods, motivations, and uses of their films could not be more diametrically opposed to those of official film-making. Theirs is a painstaking process of investigation and human interaction in which the finished film is a secondary, almost incidental component. They are more interested in process, in film as a tool of political consciousness-raising and social transformation.

A sociologist might divide Colombia's "lower" classes into three sectors: unskilled urban workers on the margin of the national economy, indigenous populations completely outside it, and the semi-inscribed rural agricultural workers. It is no coincidence that Silva and Rodriguez's three films each deal with one of these sectors: *Chircales* (*Brickmakers,* 1972) with the former; *Planas: Testimony About an Ethnicide,* 1973) with the violent expropriation of an indigenous tribe; the *Campesinos* (*Peasants,* 1976) with the situation of the Colombia peasant.

The latter, which recently took first prize at Oberhausen and at Tampere (Finland), is the longest and most thematically ambitious, exploring the historical evolution and social formation of the Colombian peasantry, their manipulation by powerful political interests, and their growing proletarianization. The genesis and method of *Planas* differs markedly from that of the other two films. Government aggression toward the Guahibo tribe and subsequent official denial brought Silva and Rodriguez to the area to film a counter-informational reconstruction based on the testimony of the Indians themselves. The time pressure under which they were forced to work precluded the lengthy information-gathering procedures which provide the foundation for *Campesinos* and especially *Brickmakers,* which was more than a decade in the making.

At once diachronic and synchronic in structure, *Brickmakers* captures the texture and contradictions of one brickmaking family's daily life, the rhythms and progression of their work, and the predetermined



Colombia: CAMPESINOS
(*Marta Rodriguez and Jorge Silva*)

futility of their struggle to survive. Occasionally intrusive musical accompaniment and the excessive iconization of two characters make the film less than perfect. Yet as an example of what I would call "contextual" film-making, *Brickmakers* is extremely significant. Before they brought in so much as a light meter, the film-makers spent months acquainting themselves with the community. Hundreds of hours of informal taped interviews constituted the first phase of their work. Once synthesized and analyzed, these began to suggest content and organization for the eventual film. Later they brought in a still camera; set-ups were planned on the basis of these photographs. By the time a movie camera was finally introduced, no one was disconcerted by its presence. The film-makers thus managed to keep superficial and temporary modifications in behavior, always occasioned by the very fact of observation, to a minimum; they wanted the inevitable changes resulting from their presence to be more internalized and permanent. They took care to ensure that at each stage of production the results were evaluated by all the participants. The brickmakers' union, born of the critical awareness which originated in the experience of

Colombia: BRICKMAKERS
(Jorge Silva and Marta Rodriguez)

the filming, has recently asked Silva and Rodriguez to film an epilogue. They want to document the progress which they have made in awareness and control over their lives, and, in the context of that progress, they dismiss the film's current ending as defeatist. The point is that the product of film-makers who give priority to context is never completely "finished."

Carlos Mayolo and Luis Ospina are representative of a more moderate group of independent film-makers, neither integrated into nor completely separated from the official film industry. They see no practical or theoretical reason why they, as serious and skilled film-makers, should not insert their films into the surcharge circuit. After what is generally recognized as an arbitrary rejection by the Advisory Board of his *Sin Telón* (*Without Curtain,* 1974, about Bogotá's most famous peoples' theater group) Mayolo based *La hamaca* (*The Hammock,* 1975) on a short story by a well-known regionalist writer. He reasons that the literary precedent lends a legitimizing prestige which the censors will be hard-pressed to deny. The quality of the acting, the authenticity of the setting, and the competence of the direction are almost upstaged by the force of the storyline. As in *La criada* (*The Maid,* 1976), which I saw in process on Ospina's editing table, an anecdotal and often caustic exploration of one human being's oppression at the hands of another ends with a carefully premeditated revenge—all the more emotionally satisfying for its extremism.

That these films work on an emotional rather than a conceptual level is indicative of a series of compromises which these two film-makers have made in the face of the current situation. In abandoning their previous documentary work in favor of their current experimentation with short fictional films, and in doing so as radicals who seek to show their work through official rather than alternative channels, they have been obliged to exchange political explicitness for irony and corrosive humor. They feel that these are effective means of reaching the larger audience to which the surcharge circuit gives them access, and that access to such a broad audience is well worth the price. They argue that the technical quality and thematic aggressiveness of their films will expose the mediocrity of current official production and contribute to its amelioration.

ECUADOR: ONE FILM DOES NOT A MOVEMENT MAKE

"Underdevelopment" has become a sort of omnibus word in Latin America to evoke, if not explain, all the ills which have resulted from five centuries of foreign domination. It is a word which comes to mind at every turn in a country like Ecuador, because the measure of underdevelopment lies not so much in the degree of absolute deprivation as in the range between extremes. I attended a visual communications forum at the Catholic University where, for lack of facilities, sheets of folded paper, taped onto a blackboard, served as a projection screen. I was present the following day when the Central University, a mile away, re-inaugurated its 12,000-seat theater, complete with a newly acquired 70-millimeter projector.

In both cases, American-made films were the order of the day. *That's Entertainment* (called *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* in Spanish) was the reinauguration special. Several American-made experimental films—highly expressionistic exercises in a primarily psychedelic mode—headed the other program, ostensibly to illustrate the possibilities of noncommercial cinema. The very abstraction of these shorts so distanced them from all but the most archetypal human experience that they were superfluous for any Latin American audience, even one which was some 70% white in a country where the total Caucasion population totals only 10%. The pyrotechnical ostentation of these films, however, *was*

potentially functional in this underdeveloped context; as agents of artistic intimidation and perpetuators of a cultural inferiority complex, they were very effective.

Ecuador and Paraguay are the only two countries where the film movement which has stirred the rest of the subcontinent has barely cast a shadow. The road to Ecuadorian national cinema is paved with a single film and a lot of good intentions. Gustavo Guayasamín's short feature, *El cielo para la Cushi, caraju* (roughly translated: *My Cushi Goes to Heaven, Goddammitto-hell,* 1975) is pathetic in its overwrought sentimentality and sheer directorial incompetence. Arbitrary angles, mismatches, white-outs, and the rejection of any sound track whatsoever are the kind of "techniques" which this fumbling film-maker employs as if by default. His subject is a chapter of *Huasipungo,* an indianist novel of the thirties which still stands as Ecuador's major literary monument.

"Why choose such a defeatist episode," several members of the audience asked Guayasamín, "when today no indigenous community would stand passively by while one of its members was flogged by police?" "That," answered the director with a candor which only underlines his obtuseness, "is exactly what the *indígenas* said when they refused to continue participating in the film and asked us to leave." Both the production process and the resulting film are grotesque caricatures of the theory and practice of militant Latin American cinema. Guayasamín's film is but another in a long line of expropriations of the Indian peoples.

The dialectical tension between aspiration and practical possibility has fueled much of the achievement and innovation of the New Latin American cinema. Reduced financial resources, for instance, necessitated lighter equipment and allowed for more spontaneous filming techniques; lack of access to traditional distribution channels necessitated the organization of alternative circuits and incidentally occasioned a dialogue between film-makers and their audience which has played a crucial role in determining future directions for the movement. It is ironic that Jorge Sanjinés and the Grupo Ukamau, whose trajectory since *Blood of the Condor* is an excellent example of this dialectic,* were prevented from filming the same novel. Undaunted, the group still plans to film in Ecuador under sponsorship of the Central University's Film Department. The practical experience of that project will provide an impetus and a model far more constructive than Guayasamín's negative example.

*See "From Militant Cinema to Neo-Realism: The Example of *Pueblo Chico,*" by Erich Keel, in *FQ*, Summer 1976.

Bolivia: BLOOD OF THE CONDOR
(Jorge Sanjines and the Ukamau Group)

PERU: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

The Peruvian "model"—a military dictatorship which drapes "socialist" reforms over capitalist structures—was once expected to gain a following among Latin American nations. Now it is the converse which demands the question mark: will Peru follow the lead of its relentlessly repressive neighbors? The internal coup of August 29, 1975 temporarily stemmed the rightist tide, and the current premier, Fernández Maldonado, is seen by leftists as the last of the "good guys." The increasing isolation of progressive elements means that any gains are shaky at best, as the recent turnabout on workers' control in the press sector indicates. Grave economic and social problems and a heightened, self-conscious class struggle point to acute conflict in the near future. Many are not optimistic. "We are living in the eye of the storm," a Peruvian film-maker told me. "All of a sudden we may find ourselves in Caracas, thinking of all the films we could have made and should have made, but didn't."

To say that under current circumstances film-making is a luxury which few of Peru's committed film-makers can afford to indulge in would be only a slight exaggeration. On the other hand, no one maintains that Peruvian film-making should be measured by what has been produced so far. Peru's film law, promulgated in 1972, bears a definite resemblance to Colombia's, and both have been severely criticized for serving the interests of private capital and established film companies. *Hablemos de cine,* Peru's widely respected film journal, describes the officially approved brand of film as "sanitized, conformist, superficially 'cultural,' characterized by the absence of anything which might be seen as troublesome, uncomfortable, or conflictive."

The union of film-makers and technicians, and another of workers in the exhibition sector, both

excluded from participation in formulating the law, have waged a press campaign against it. They propose a new law which would make financial backing accessible to all social sectors, eliminate censorship, reduce the bureaucratic role of the state while strengthening the participation of the various film-related unions, favor cooperative forms of production, and extend the mechanisms of distribution. At last report they had achieved a semi-victory: the old law is on the way out; what remains to be seen is whether or not its successor will be an improvement.

Of the film-makers known outside Peru, Manuel Chambi, a key figure in what Georges Sadoul identifies as the "Cuzco School," continues to work sporadically, recording the rituals of El Inca's descendants and giving increasing attention to the uses to which first the Spanish and then the mestizo governments have put these rituals. Armando Robles Godoy, whose recent features *The Green Wall* (1969) and *Espejismo* (*Mirage,* 1974) have taken prizes at the Chicago Film Festival, is in Bogotá making a mammoth soap opera called *The New Arrivals.* (His "original slant" on land reform consists of taking the point of view of the landholders; his "original technique" consists of applying his flashy film style to television.) Robles prides himself on showy cinematography and insists that technical mastery is the essence of the film art. In *Mirage,* as in its predecessor, formal fireworks exist for their own sake, most often unrelated to or at odds with the narrative content. Actors become symbolic vehicles, and plot resolution, despite certain concessions to a safe Latin version of radical chic, is motivated by an ultimately reactionary fatalism.

Robles's importance lies in his demonstration that underdeveloped cinema need not be visually primitive, and in the apprenticeship opportunities which he has provided to some of those who now make up the more committed sector of Peruvian film-making. Nora de Izcue, who studied under Robles, is a case in point. The style and method of her documentaries, as well as her commitment to militant unionism as the only viable solution to the problematics of film in contemporary Peru, now place her at the opposite end of the spectrum from her mentor. In *Runan Caycu* (*I Am a Man,* 1973) she uses a variety of material (stills, video, newspaper headlines, period documentaries, interviews) to reconstruct the struggle for land and justice among the Quechua-speaking peasants on the Andean plateau. The subsequent filming of Sanjines's *The Principal Enemy* (1974) has *post facto* turned Nora's film into a potential companion piece. (For his narrator, Sanjinés "borrows" the peasant leader who appears in *Runan Caycu,* making him into a visual and oral icon of the Inca tradition.) Recounting as it does the Andean community's militant past, *Runan Caycu* supplies essential background which Sanjinés, in order to enhance the role of the guerrillas, leaves out.

It is all too familiar paradox that neither film can be seen in Peru. *Runan Caycu,* financed by a government agency and subsequently edited by them to achieve greater consistency with official views, remains in the agency's vault. This is not an isolated incident. In fact, some political film-makers see it as part of a concerted strategy. Government agencies enlist the talents and energies of militant film-makers but often manage to keep the results under wraps. Anger and opposition can be dispelled by putting the same film-makers to work on another film, though this one too runs the risk of not being released.

Like Nora de Izcue, other independents have a commitment to collective film-making. Robles's daughter Marcela forms part of a group called Liberación Sin Rodeos (roughly: Liberation Without Run-Arounds) which has produced some ten documentaries in the past two years, an impressive number by Third World standards. Thematically and stylistically varied, their films have been consistently criticized for lacking ideological focus and coherence. *Niños de Cuzco* (*Children of Cuzco,* 1974) is a case in point. The film eloquently captures the clash of cultures which dominates the lives of these Quechua children as they make the daily transition from village community to anonymous city streets. Masterful pacing and immediacy of detail lend a lyrical beauty to the rural sequences which at times threatens to engulf the film in a false romanticism. A particularly effective technique has the face of one of the children persist in close-up after the word "Fin" has designated the end of the film. His expression changes to one of solemnity and challenge, but the film, having chosen to evoke rather than to analyze, provides no framework for interpreting this final shot.

One of the most memorable Peruvian shorts is *Teatro de la calle* (*Street Theater,* 1974) by a group called Bruma Films. Because it is more spontaneous than film, street theater is in many parts of Latin America a more flexible vehicle for heightening popular awareness and channeling political protest. Film-makers can render the service of occasionally documenting an otherwise ephimeral interaction between actors and their public. Using a hand-held camera and direct sound, this film combines several performances by José Acuña, who left professional acting to earn his living on the street corner and explains why at the end of the film. The force of Acuña's mime is what makes the film memorable, since the film-makers fail to resolve the

contradictions inherent in this type of project: the camera continually breaks the rapport between actor and audience, focusing on one to the exclusive of the other and fragmenting the film viewer's perception of the whole.

Of the hundred Peruvian shorts produced last year, the one which has received the most unqualified praise is not a film at all, but a filmed photomontage. Difficulties with financing eventually drove its director, Nelson García, to this expedient. *Bombón Colorado, campeón* (1975) is a tightly controlled meditation on the rise and fall of a legendary black boxer of the same name. Inspired in a "creole polka" which has consecrated and perpetuated Bombón's fame, the film uses forms of popular culture to celebrate a popular hero and, in contrast to similar attempts which give themselves away by their condescending attitude to their material, succeeds in conveying a genuine appreciation of both.

FROM "THE ARGENTINE SPRING" TO THE FALL OF ISABEL PERÓN

Argentines are a movie-going people. As a population constituted by periodic waves of European immigration, and therefore characterized by pride in their "cosmopolitan" heritage, they have long granted movies a privileged place in their cultural life. Any Argentine film fan will tell you, for instance, that Bergman was a cult figure in Buenos Aires long before even the Parisians had recognized his genius. In Latin America, only the Mexican film industry rivals Argentina's in terms of duration, technical infrastructure, and size of its export audience.

More than its rival, the Argentine industry has been plagued with periodic depressions and crises. The stimulus to production brought about by reduced competition from Hollywood during World War II was offset by the difficulty of obtaining raw film stock. During the following decade, Perón created protective legislation to stimulate the national film industry, but also imposed rigid censorship. After his ouster, production declined. Despite a rise in production in the late fifites and the emergence of a promising new generation of directors in the early sixties, the oft-predicted "boom" was a long time in coming. Production never really "peaked" until a full 15 years later, in 1974.

In that year the number and quality of films produced, and public enthusiasm as reflected in box-office receipts, exceeded anything in living memory. An output of 36 features represented the maximum which the current infrastructure can bear. New directors appeared and the old "new wave" of the early sixties resurfaced with renewed energies. Topics which had never before been treated in such a way on the Argentine screen asserted themselves there because, as one film-maker put it, "The public was demanding a cinematographic response to the unprecedented historical moment we were all living through."

That particular historical moment, tragically ephemeral, is referred to nostalgically as "the Argentine spring." In 1972, popular insurrections and general disaffection compelled the military regime, after eight years in power, to revive political parties and step down in favor of general elections. Héctor Cámpora, the Peronist candidate, assumed the presidency on May 25, 1973 amidst popular euphoria. Less than a month later, General Juan Perón returned triumphally after nearly 20 years in exile. New general elections brought Perón himself back to power on October 12th. Nine months later, having bequeathed the presidency to his third wife, he was dead. On March 24th of this year, a "surgical" coup packed Isabelita off to a distant mountain retreat and reinstituted military rule. The situation in Argentina has come full circle. The great release is now only a memory, but several films remain as eloquent testimony to the creativity so briefly unleashed.

Leonardo Favio's *Juan Moreira,* released in 1972, was a kind of beacon which marked the way for subsequent production. Based on the life of a legendary folk hero, but rejecting the romanticized revisionism of traditional treatments, this film broke all box-office records. Tired of imports and imitations, the Argentine populace was demanding the critical exploration of national themes on the national screen.

The inevitable lag between conception and release meant that most of the films generated by the resurgent popular spirit of 1973 didn't appear until 1974, when the reins of political repression were being drawn in again. In the case of the most important film of this period, the changed political climate induced an extreme form of self-censorship. Despite its vast popularity, director and producer pulled *La Patagonia rebelde* (*Rebellion in Patagonia,* shown this year at Filmex in Los Angeles) from distribution in anticipation of a government ban on the film. Based on a journalist and historian's best-selling account of the most suppressed chapter of Argentine military history, the film presents a minimally fictionalized reconstruction of events which culminated in the massacre of several hundred striking agricultural workers in 1921. Nothing in the previous careers of either film-maker suggested their potential for making such a film, but as frequently happens when quasi-documentary techniques are employed in a Third World context, the larger realities assert themselves despite the biases and limited aware-

ness of the "creators" of the work of art. The search for authenticity led Hector Olivera and Fernando Ayala to reject traditional methods—to film on location, for example, despite the remoteness of the region, and to enlist the participation of the local community—so that in effect, if not in intention, *Rebellion in Patagonia* bears a stronger resemblance to militant than to establishment film-making.

The adaptation of literary works for the screen is nothing new in the Argentine film industry; what is of interest is the range of national life dealt with in the adaptations released during this period. Sergio Renán's *La tregua* (*The Truce*) moves Mario Benedetti's now classic tale of a middle-aged, middle-class man from the Montivideo of the fifites across the River Plate to the Buenos Aires of the seventies. The enthusiasm generated by this account of love found and again lost in the autumn of life can only be compared to the sentimental hysteria sparked in the US by *Love Story.*

Other literary adaptations reject middle-class life and cultural forms in favor of popular culture. In Rodolfo Kuhn's *La hora de María y el pájaro de oro* (*Maria and the Golden Bird*), scripted by novelist Gudiño Kieffer, apparitions and amulets, witchcraft, and the antagonistic bifurcation of the female persona are the narrative elements of this reconstituted folk legend. That cinematic expressivity is subordinated to them is apparent in the conventionality of the style. Unlike the brilliant Cuban film *Days of Water* (1971), for instance, to which it bears a thematic resemblance, Kuhn's film merely aspires to imitate rather than to elucidate the myth-making dynamics of rural folk culture. It thus simultaneously commodifies and further mystifies a complex phenomenon.

In Ricardo Wurlicher's trilogy *Quebracho,* different periods, casts, and settings are united by a central thread. Wurlicher uses the extraction of *quebracho,* for many decades an essential element in the leather tanning process, as a paradigm of colonialist operations in Argentina. The dialectical interplay of opposing interests which pits workers against bosses in ever-escalating conflict provides the film's narrative center and connective tissue. Like *Rebellion in Patagonia,* this film "goes national" in theme and setting, and its impact is substantial. But it remains "colonized" on the formal level if one views the imitation of Hollywood-style cinematography and plot construction as an implicit acceptance of the values which generated that particular film style.

The problem of decolonizing cinema has been central to the Argentine "Third Cinema" movement whose foremost theorists and practitioners, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, reject both Hollywood and auteurist models in search of themes and styles adequate to the liberation process in the Third World. After years of clandestine distribution, *The Hour of the Furnaces* and the pair's subsequent *Old Man Reales's Road to Death* (1971, made with Gerardo Vallejo) had limited commercial runs during the "thaw." Vested interests felt vindicated by the tepidness of public response, but the film-makers are fully cognizant of the underlying contradiction in a commercial release of their films.

The current situation allows for neither commercial nor clandestine distribution of their films. Their work is constrained by a government-sponsored repression which once threatened jail but now threatens death. Solanas's most recent film, *The Sons of Fierro,* a semifictional feature which reportedly assigns one of the political alternatives facing Argentina to each of the three sons of the gaucho hero, is stowed away against more favorable circumstances. Cine de la Base, the other prominent group of "guerrilla" film-makers (known in this country for *The Traitors,* 1972) is now dedicated exclusively to "internal consumption" cinema. The films they produce function as "detonators" of political discussion within a restricted setting. Recent political events may have forced the end of even this super-secret activity.

Two films shown at Pesaro in 1975 seemed to represent the best which can be hoped for given the restrictiosn of the current situation. Bebe Kamin's *El buho* (*The Owl*) is an independent production which testifies to the impressive talents waiting in the wings of the established film industry. It is a sensitive and often visually arresting study of the alienation of work and personal life and the resulting detachment, inner-directed eroticism, and vindicatory fantasies of a young female factory worker. Its moving authenticity seems to derive from the cooperative conditions under which it was made. More psychological than political, the film takes pains to expose the disjunction between personal experience and the "official" version of reality, and in this self-conscious "deconstruction" of the alienating effects of modern life, it makes an important political contribution.

Lautaro Murúa, actor as well as film-maker, represents the best that the established industry has to offer. Since the early sixties his films have focused a sympathetic yet critical eye on the Argentine *lumpen.* *La Raulito* is based on the factual case of a young woman who lived among the street urchins and passed herself off as a male. ("It's not that I want to be a man; I just don't want to be a woman.") only to be hounded by police and shunted from reformatory to asylum. The film is of outstanding technical and artistic quality, but one can't help sensing its reluctance to broach the larger issues behind this story of one individual's struggle to be free of society's artificial norms.

Argentina: LA RAULITO (*Lautaro Murua*)

Even such moderate forms of social criticism are now totally out of the question in Argentina. A portent of the gravity of the situation came a few weeks after the recent military coup, when Leopoldo Torre Nilsson's latest film, *Piedra libre* (*Free Stone*) was banned by the government. That what was by all accounts a rather banal story of deceit among the accommodated classes, directed by the country's most established (one could even say "official") film-maker, should be banned as unsympathetic to the oligarchy has its ironic dimension. Torre Nilsson immediately exiled himself to Spain, several leading actors following in his wake. Alternatives do not come so easily to those who remain. Raymundo Gleyzer, a leading militant film-maker who is best known in this country for *Mexico: The Frozen Revolution* (1971), disappeared this spring. An international letter campaign has yet to elicit any information on his whereabouts or possible fate.* What reports filter through indicate that film-makers, novelists, poets—along with all suspected political activists—are currently being arrested, tortured, and in many cases assassinated with a frequency and a ferocity that rival the aftermath of the Chilean coup.

BRAZIL: A LONG TIME DYING

Censorship is prevalent all over Latin America, but only in Brazil are film viewers given a graphic reminder five or six times during their first ten minutes in the theater. Every film and every trailer has an obligatory leader showing the certificate of approval from the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Federal Police, and the Board of Censors. Bureaucracy seems to be the name of the game in Brazilian cinema. In February of this year, the National Film Institute, established by the military government in 1966, and the state film enterprise Embrafilme, founded in 1969, merged under the name of the latter. Now approval of proposed film projects, financing, and distribution in and outside of Brazil take place under a single aegis.

But what about the films themselves? What has transpired in the medium since late 1968 when Institutional Act Number Five consigned freedom of expression, or more accurately, those who indulge in it, to the seventh circle of hell? Of the Cinema Novo's "stars," the vast majority have remained in Brazil. Glauber Rocha is the most renowned exception. In the years he has been in self-imposed exile, he has made

Argentina: FREE STONE (*Leopoldo Torre Nilsson*)

*The Emergency Committee to Defend Latin American Film-makers coordinates efforts in this country in defense of the growing number of Latin American film-makers imprisoned by hostile regimes. For further information, contact the Committee at 339 Lafayette Street, New York 10012 (212 260-7620).

Brazil: São Bernardo
(Leon Hirszman)

one film in the Congo (*The Lion Has Seven Heads,* 1969), one in Spain (*Several Heads,* 1970), one in Italy (*Claro!*, 1974) and another (*Revolução!*) in Paris last October. He plans to film *Alexander the Great* on location in Greece and Egypt with financing from Italian television, and was recently in the US seeking a producer for *The Age of the Earth*, which he was prevented from filming in Mexico last year. An article he published recently in a Brazilian magazine indicated that the weary pilgrim would like an invitation home. Latest reports have him back in Brazil, starting a magazine of his own.

On the topic of the movement he in large part spearheaded, Rocha has contradicted himself time and again, alternately declaring its definitive demise and asserting that Cinema Novo lives on in a different guise. Three important films were produced by Cinema Novo directors in the early part of the decade: Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1969), Leon Hirszman's *São Bernardo* (1970) and Nelson Pereria dos Santos's *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* (1971). Each takes on—and meets—the challenge of a substantial segment of Brazilian reality. *Macunaíma,* based on a key novel of the twenties adapted to the current period, is blatantly and often outrageously mythic, operating on the basis of codes which are indicipherable to those not steeped in Brazilian lore, but which speak loud and clear to those who are. In Hirszman's beautifully low-key *São Bernardo,** the life of a single self-made rancher comes to represent the rise of one entire social sector and the destruction of another. *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* stands as an island in Pereira dos Santos's *oeuvre,* a dazzlingly original ethnographic satire which resembles nothing he has done before or since.

Brazil: Love Lesson
(Eduardo Escorel)

Dos Santos's film seems to have generated a following. Two recent features (André Luiz's *The Legend of Ubirajara* and Gustavo Dahl's *Uirá*) are based on anthropological reconstructions. The visual ambitions of the former and its obsession with the naked male body engaged in combat seem to motivate the film more urgently than any anthropological impulse. The second film portrays a family of Brazilian Indians as they contemplate and are contemplated by the good citizens of Maranão in the early part of the century. That Dahl regrets the outcome of this clash of cultures is clear when his stylistic realism splits apart at the end of the film as he tries, but fails, to turn his indigenous hero's defeat into a mythic victory.

Apart from these two films which risk over-indulgence in cultural specificity, most current Brazilian pictures might be set at the North Pole. All particulars of Brazilian life, past or present, seem carefully excised. Eduardo Escorel's *Love Lesson**(1976), despite its nostalgia for the São Paulo of the twenties, conveys a closed world without history, and portrays characters of indefinite past and uncertain future, offering only a restricted vision of their "sentimental life." The filmmaker rebels at times against his own suppression. The violent images used to convey the sister's resentment of her brother's sexual initiation are never developed or pursued.

The experience of years of expressive indirection enable some to see Pereira dos Santos's recent *The Amulet of Agum** as a pointed political allegory of the current situation. Such exegetes have to question whether a gangster movie with overtones of *macumba* does not though its form desensitize the very perceptions which they attribute to it.

The two best contemporary Brazilian films, in my opinion, are in the documentary rather than the fictional mode. Tania Quaresma's *Music and People of the Northeast**(1975) depicts the resilient ballad tradition of the drought-plagued Northeast. More than a

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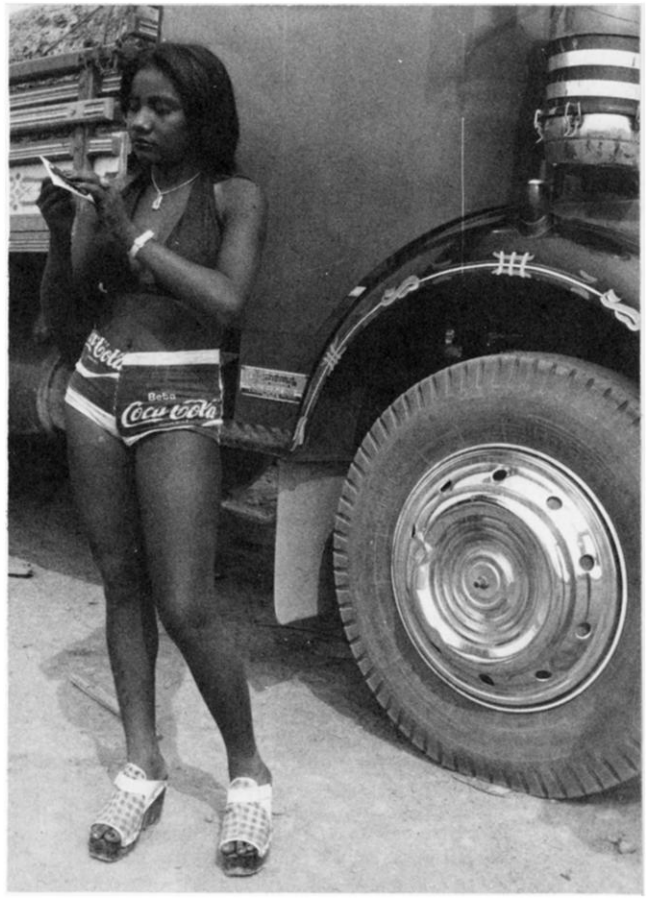
*Recently made available for US distribution by Fabiano Canosa, 317 W. 99th Street (#2C), New York, New York 10025.

film about a musical tradition, it becomes an ode to the people who give that tradition life, because the director takes care to convey, through pans and long shots of public and private spaces, the material conditions of life in the region. Against this background, some of the performances stand out like polished gems.

Jorge Badansky's *Iracema* (1975) is striking in what it eliminates: melodrama, histrionics, psychologisms, hyperbole. It is in fact the antithesis of a baroque, "tropicalist" film like *Macunaíma.* Unlike the current spate of Brazilian films which shut out the surrounding world and thus cut off what they purport to explore (the human psyche) from the medium which nurtures it, *Iracema* inscribes the surrounding environment into a "personal" story in a way that illuminates both the individual and the world around her.

In its unobtrusive way, this film is a kind of modern-day allegory. Iracema, a 15-year-old Amazonian of pure Indian blood, deserts her family's boat and subsistence way of life for the plastic trinkets of Belem on festival day. She is picked up by Tião Braxil Grande, a truckdriver who takes her along on a run to haul virgin timber from the interior. He promises her broad horizons, but on the return he dumps her at a raunchy all-night bar. So it begins: in an increasingly dehumanizing fashion, Iracema is taken advantage of, deceived, abused. (To the film's credit, it refrains from voyeurism and titillation at Iracema's expense by focusing on the prelude and the results rather than the details of each incident.) In the first months of her prostitution, she is mined for all she's worth, then, like slag, discarded. The industrial metaphor is not a casual one. Like her region, now in the throes of "development," like her country and like her continent, Iracema is exploited and then abandoned by those who make big promises but take what they can get before moving on to the next virgin territory. Its direct-cinema style and nonprofessional actors account in large part for the film's subtlety and understatement, but despite its many virtues, it has not yet received approval for exhibition inside Brazil.



Brazil: IRACEMA*
(Jorge Bodansky)

VENEZUELA: BACK IN ROCKY'S BACKYARD

If you're on foot and want to avoid an untimely end on a crowded expressway, there is only one route from the offices of Palcine (the best-stocked and most successful distributor of Latin American cinema on the subcontinent) to the Venezuelan Cinemateca: through the lobby of the Hilton Hotel. It just happens to be built on land that was once Caracas's Central Park. This is as apt a means as any for conveying the schizophrenia of a capital that is neither completely Latin nor completely Americanized but rather a hybrid monster which combines the most distressing aspects of both. Extreme contrasts of wealth and poverty, no less painful for their now clichéd status in accounts of Latin America, are more pronounced here than anywhere else on the continent. It is not surprising that in this playground of the Rockefellers and other members of the international oil cartel, the pick of the flicks are Hollywood-grown. What *is* surprising is that any impulse to an autonomous cinema exists.

The impulse goes a long way back—to Margot Benacerraf's *Araya,* a feature-length documentary on life in the salt marshes, acclaimed at Cannes in 1958 but never shown commercially in Venezuela. The decade of the sixties was rich in activity, but poor in concrete results. A handful of documentaries stand out: Jesús Enrique Guédez's *The City That Watches Us* (1966) reveals the other, marginal Caracas, Carlos Rebolledo's *Empty Well* (1967) analyzes the national petroleum industry; Jorge Solé's *TV Venezuela* (1969) is

*Also available in the US from Fabiano Canosa (see previous footnote).

a hard-hitting denunciation of media manipulation which skillfully incorporates a wide variety of visual material in a style which owes some of its inspiration to Cuban documentarist Santiago Alvarez and to the Argentine film-makers who made *The Hour of the Furnaces.*

The best of recent short documentary production is attributed to two Uruguayans: Ugo Ulive's *The One-Man Band* (1972) and *T.O. 3*, winner of the Municipal Prize in 1975, in which the camera, except for occasional zooms, remains completely stationary while a former political prisoner recounts his experiences under torture: Mario Handler's *Two Ports and a Ridge* exposes the unequal exchange which characterizes Third World commerce: valuable raw materials sold cheap to purchase over-priced manufactured goods. Manuel de Pedro's *Juan Vicente Gómez* (1975) is a feature-length documentary on the life of a former dictator. Its success at the box-office is viewed as a green light for other serious historical films.

In addition to its technical assets (sophisticated laboratories and equipment, ample availability of raw film stock, private and government capital available to stimulate production), Venezuelan film-makers have an added advantage: their countrymen like Venezuelan movies and show their support at the box office. Currently this cinematic nationalism extends only to features, but these at least take on crucial aspects of national reality. The trend began when Mauricio Wallerstein, son of a famous Mexican producer, made *When I Want to Cry, I Can't,* based on a best-selling Venezuelan novel, in 1973. Its success led him to film *Chronicle of a Latin American Subversive* in 1974. Román Charbaud's *Sacred and Obscene* (1976) also takes up the theme of the now virtually defunct guerrilla struggle during the mid-sixties. The politics of these films are debatable, but at least they offer material for discussion rather than hiding behind a false and derivative "universalism" which excises all national content. After years of delay, the government has finally instituted a subsidy which provides 40-50% of production costs. Nine features were produced in 1975 under this system, three times the number produced only a few years earlier.

Whether or not the next few years verify the optimism of those who predict the rise of an important national film movement in Venezuela, the country has another crucial role to play. Since the mid-sixties, committed film people have been creating a number of important film-related institutions in Venezuela: the Cinemateca, the Film Department of the University of Los Angeles in Mérida, where a large part of the documentary movement originated; various film-makers' cooperatives and coalitions; and *Cine al Dia,* one of the best Spanish-language film magazines, now in its tenth year. The recently established Palcine, the only distributor outside of Cuba which offers Latin audiences access to a comprehensive sprectrum of the New Latin American cinema, currently reaches some 150,000 spectators per year with its films. This human infrastructure, responsible for such key events as the Festival of Latin American Cinema at Mérida in 1968 and the Conference of Latin American Film-makers in 1974, has attracted exiled film-makers from numerous Latin American countries and enabled them to continue their work. Venezuela's role is of incalculable importance in sustaining a movement which many powerful forces are determined to wipe out.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

In its fragemented, dislocated, and embattled way, the New Latin American Cinema lives on. Everywhere an evaluation of past experience and a reassessment of future possibilities seems to be underway. Direct and indirect repression of the movement has taken its toll. Gradations of suppression, as we have seen, range from the cooptation and mystification of militant themes and styles, through blanket censorship and the indirect forms which it engenders, to imprisonment, exile, even death, as in the most recent case of several Chilean and Argentine film workers. Brazil's Glauber Rocha, Bolivia's Jorge Sanjinés, Chile's Miguel Littín, Uruguay's Mario Handler, Colombia's Carlos Alvarez are a few of those who have been compelled to work in exile, always attempting to remain somewhere on the continent. Others, like Solanas in Argentina and several Brazilians, have rejected this alternative and chosen to stay in their countries at the cost of severely constrained possibilities of expression and, in some cases, enforced silence. Still others, like Colombia's Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo, attempt to slip Trojan horses behind the walls of the official film industry.

That militant Latin American cinema cannot, with the exception of Venezuela, be seen in Latin America is eloquent testimony to its effectiveness and power. Public response was too threatening to the status quo. It confirmed a need which vested interests can no longer stave off with imported palliatives, and must now attempt to fill with officially endorsed surrogates. This attempt involves contradictions which can potentially serve the interests of those who aspire to decolonialize rather than recolonize their Third World public. The task at hand is clear: to keep the embers alive until, when conditions again permit, they may burst forth once more into flames.

Film Reviews

THE MAGIC FLUTE

(TROLLFÖJTEN) Director: Ingmar Bergman. Script. Ingmar Bergman, after Emanuel Schikaneder's libretto. Photography: Sven Nykvist. Music: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Ingmar Bergman's film version of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute* (commissioned by Swedish television for airing during the holiday season of 1974) follows the original fairly closely, so details of the plot can be found in any standard opera guide or libretto.

At first glance, the coupling of Mozart's elaborate religious mystery-drama with the director of arid psychological films like *Face to Face* and *Scenes from a Marriage* may seem troublesome—and indeed it finally proves to be so. But on the other hand, we can see precedent for Bergman's *Magic Flute* in his early films—the costume allegory of *The Seventh Seal,* the play-within-a-play structures of *Smiles of a Summer Night* and *Devil's Eye,* and the playful, pictorial prettiness of *All These Women.* We also tend to forget here in America that Bergman is a major theatrical director for the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm and has over the past 15 years occasionally directed operas for the Royal Opera in Stockholm. In a 1962 interview between Bergman and Bengt Janzon ("Bergman on Opera," *Opera News,* May 5, 1962) Bergman spoke of wanting to produce Schönberg, Berlioz, Verdi, Offenbach, and Mussorgsky operas, but concluded: "The most alluring and difficult opera ever written is Mozart's *Magic Flute.* Nothing interests me more than this work; it offers a producer more hurdles than any other opera."

The "hurdles" Bergman refers to are both technological and ideological. The *Magic Flute* requires a complicated stage production with a dozen different sets, elaborate props including a giant serpent, a chariot drawn by lions, a flying machine, people popping out from trapezes and trap doors, all in addition to a dozen brilliant singer-actors including three children. As if that weren't enough, the plot of the opera itself is a complex allegory, full of esoteric symbols and ritual ceremonies, as well as comic buffoonery

MAGIC FLUTE: *The Queen's Ladies surround Tamino.*

and improbable transformations. On one hand, the high-serious moral purpose of the piece is everywhere evident, but on the other hand, it is not always easy, at first glance, to understand the exact meaning of any given passage. However, as we all know from Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, Mozart was the wisest, most humane and most good-humored of men. Would he have written, as his last, most mature opera, a meaningless, ill-planned, or mindlessly prejudiced work? It hardly seems likely. Perhaps we should give him the benefit of the doubt, scrutinizing his text and music carefully under the assumption that the genius who transformed our concept of opera with his extended ensemble numbers in *Marriage of Figaro*, his introduction of motifs from the operas into his overtures for *Cosi* and *Don Giovanni*, his penchant for well-wrought realistic detail (e.g., the letter scene from *Figaro* which possesses already a credibility still absent from, say, the dictation of the Prize song in Wagner's *Meistersinger* three-quarters of a century later)—that same genius may have executed *The Magic Flute* along similar sensible and meaningful lines.

In the *Opera News* interview, Bergman says that though he feels many of Mozart's true intentions remain lost to us, he hopes to recover some of the authenticity of *The Magic Flute* by intense study of the staging of the original performances in Vienna in 1791. Evidently he actually did this, for some of the details in his film, like the costumes of the three ladies-in-waiting, the lions drawing Sarastre's chariot, and the armored guards at the trial site, are taken directly from contemporary sketches of the première. Still other details not ordinarily observed in stage productions, like the entrance of the three boys (really played by three children!) in an air-ship, are fully realized in the Bergman *mise en scène*. Further authenticity is lent by some scenes staged in Drottningholm Court Theatre, a genuine eighteenth-century opera house that survived intact (with period sets nd machinery) into the twentieth century by virtue of the fact that it was associated with King Gustave III's assassination in 1792, and so remained closed until 1912.

However, Bergman also takes a number of liberties with the staging that are in fact unfortunate. The ritual, symbolic meaning of *The Magic Flute* is not all that obscure to the careful observer or researcher. Alfred Einstein understood it quite well in his *Mozart: His Character, His Work* (New York, 1946). R. B. Moberly (*Three Mozart Operas*, New York, 1967, pp. 217-286) and Brigid Brophy (*Mozart the Dramatist*, New York, 1964, pp. 131-202) explain it perfectly well from two non-Masonic but sympathetic viewpoints. And a brilliant French musicologist, Jacques Chailley, published in French in 1968 (English translation by Herbert Weinstock, New York, 1971) a book-length study entitled *The Magic Flute, Masonic Opera*, which illuminates both plot and music, scene by scene, gesture by gesture, note by note (in parallel technical and lay-language paragraphs) with such thoroughness and scholarly dedication that we need never puzzle over the libretto again. Chailley firmly refutes the notion (first advanced only in the 1850s but repeated as gospel by such diverse "authorities" as Mozart biographer Edward Dent, *New Yorker* film critic Pauline Kael, and Bergman himself in his commentary on the Swedish libretto) that the plot was suddenly revised after Mozart had already begun composing Act I, and that the Queen of the Night was originally meant to be the heroine. Chailley exactingly shows that in terms of traditional Masonic symbolism, the libretto (and music) are perfectly consistent and meaningful, and must have been carefully planned so. The Queen and Sarastro (as well as Pamina and Tamino) are representations of those international cosmic energy principles—yin and yang of Chinese Tao, female and male of Tantric copulation, passive and active of Rabindranath Tagore's cosmopolitan philosophy, etc. It is a part of Mozart's genius that we see the Queen first in her best light from the viewpoint of the innocent initiate, so that the conflict between her unenlightened but appealing power-plea and Sarastro's superior Brotherhood will have a context of viability, as it does in "real life." The Four Elements—Earth, Air, Water and Fire—and not mere gimmicks of the purification trials, but rather, again, manifestations of cosmic principles which also pervade the characteristics of the protagonists. Thus Monostatos should be dirty-faced because he is an

Earth-creature, not because he belongs to a certain racial group, and Papageno (whose name implies "parrot-man") *should* be covered with feathers (as he was in the original performance) because he is an Air-creature. Bergman's rustic costume for Papageno may enhance his lovability, but it also divests him of one level of his meaning. Likewise the three boys should appear airborne in their balloon only when administering the Air test; the stage directions in the libretto specify an appropriate entrance style for each test, and having "spilled the beans" too early and too often, Bergman was forced to cut one of Mozart's most brilliant musical numbers (18 in the score) because its evocation of airborne sensation would seem tardy that late in the boys' aeronautic career.

Now I am certainly no purist who believes that a work from another medium must not be altered when it is transferred to the screen. On the contrary, I believe considerable modification is usually necessary just to obtain the same meanings and effects as are produced by the technical devices of the original medium. Bergman's *Magic Flute* abounds with admirable, felicitous moments of cinematic adaptation. In the libretto to the sound-track album, Bergman keeps a running commentary on the action which reveals his conscientiousness in this respect. He specifically cites, for example, the title cards (which the characters hold up on several occasions when the text resolves itself into gnomic aphorisms) as his filmic version of that common *"Verfremdung"* device of the eighteenth century, the "aside" to the audience. That same "aside" is also effectively portrayed in direct appeals to the camera, as in the three ladies' first number or Papageno's suicide. Bergman often uses the close-up and camera angle to sustain the sense of mystery-magic, as when the ladies appear in the form of hands reaching into frame (to pet the sleeping prince, punish Papageno, etc.). Bergman's general handling of the on-stage action, blending subtly through the clever use of close-ups into larger studio sets and locations, is cinematically exciting, and this, coupled with the exquisite color sensitivity, a cast of generally good singers who also look and act well, and the by-and-large charming rhyming English subtitles undoubtedly make Bergman's *Magic Flute* available and exciting to many who otherwise might never appreciate opera.

At the same time, I fear the film may also pander to many people's prejudice that opera is really fairy-tale nonsense anyway, because the larger question connected with a film adaptation of an opera—is it a thoroughly satisfying film as film in its own right aside from (or perhaps despite) its operatic origins?—cannot be given an unambiguously positive answer here. Many of the liberties Bergman took with Mozart's opera have not made it more comprehensible or more filmic, but rather have cheapened it and limited the durability of Bergman's film as film. Obvious examples of this are the montage of faces synched with the overture ("*Everyone* loves Mozart!"), the backstage glimpses of the stars with each overtly mirroring his on-stage role ("Isn't Life just exactly like Art?"), and the repeated cuts to Bergman's young daughter sitting in the audience giving overly clear instructions on how to react ("Now smile! Now frown!"). These are so blatant and banal, such tacky jokes that they hardly bear repeating, if indeed they do not cloy even on first viewing.

This same touch of condescension either toward Mozart (that this is, after all, just a fairy-tale) or towards the audience (who must be catered to with conspicuous cuteness) spoils other scenes in the main action where it is more crucial. If the "snake" that pursues Tamino in the beginning is reduced to Flintstone dinosaur, then Tamino's fear is likewise reduced to a laughable cartoon idiocy, and if the animals charmed by Tamino's flute ham it up as droll charade characters, his mythic role as Orpheus is cheapened to a paper-doll parody. This unfortunate tastelessness (comparable to Disney's introduction of Thumper into Rico Lebrun's *Bambi* forest) probably arises from the mistaken notion that since Papageno is clearly comic and likely to appeal to children, this gives the director license to introduce other humorous touches at will, an assumption that might as well let Macbeth urinate during one of his soliloquies because his porter does.

Again, these touches might potentially be part of a cinematic consistency more valuable than

Mozart's stage logic, but such does not seem to be the case. Bergman has undermined all the grandeur, mystery, and hieratic energy of the serious side of Mozart's work, but he is left with stripped music, dialogue, and action tht comes out rather thin and awkward and incomprehensible in many places. Bergman has suppressed the Egyptian setting (the references to Isis and Osiris, the pyramids, the gold and silver palms, the glittering thrones, the enormous sun-burst at the finale, etc.), and the splendor of the symbolic testing grounds (with magnificent waterfall and volcano) which were, for Mozart, the *visual* correlatives of the power, glory, and mysticism that are the subject of the words and music. In their place, Bergman has given us a rather protestant-looking group of men dressed alike in plain robes wandering around mostly amorphous dark spaces, and a "trial" which seems to consist of enduring a rather poor, anachronistic Martha Graham dance version of Dante's *Inferno*. Nor, by the way, do the men of Sarastro's brotherhood seem individualized enough to seem impressively "wise"; they resemble more a random group of businessmen out to lunch. Finally one begins to wonder, subconsciously at least, why anyone would want to desert the charming pastoral set of the first scene for the forbidding darkness of the "temple." These things may not actively bother the audience at first viewing but they reduce the inherent sense of logic in the story, and render repeated viewings more boring.

As we learn in one section of dialogue cut by Bergman, the Queen's dead husband was the high priest of the order before Sarastro, and she feels she should have inherited his powerful position; hence the quarrel with Sarastro and the women's knowledge of preliminary initiatory rites, possession of the magic flute and bells, etc. The rivalry between Sarastro and the Queen, then, is not just an elemental struggle between men and women (remember, Pamina, after the proper trials, becomes a respected partner in the rule of the order) nor certainly a melodrama of man and wife. It is rather a struggle between the enlightened (Sarastro, the sun-spirit) and the unenlightened who wish to wield power without proper training (including not only the Queen, but Monostatos and the ladies, who try to force enlightenment on Papageno through the wrong means, padlock and punishment). Bergman's penchant for psychologizing has led him to weaken the complex impact of the original opera; contained within the mythic conflict of Sarastro and the Queen is inherent a parental archetype, but there are also other levels. Unfortunately when Bergman forces the father-mother struggle into overt terms, he sacrifices the mythic overtones and reduces their contention to a tawdry bourgeois soap opera ("Have you heard about poor Pamina? Her parents are *divorced*, you know, and there's this continual *custody* fight!").

The Bergman of *The Seventh Seal* might have respected the Shakespearean scope and balance of Mozart's *Magic Flute* and produced a magnificent, illuminating masterwork. Instead the *Face to Face* Bergman has given us a tantalizing hodge-podge that wavers between brilliance and banality, that feeds us childish cuteness where metaphysical pageantry is called for. Perhaps a collaborative effort with Karel Zeman would have been better.

His government sponsorship may have led Bergman to draw his cast from lead singers at the major Scandinavian opera houses. All are competent singers and cogent actors, but most are less than stupendous "state-of-the-art" performers. How nice it would have been, since all this trouble was being taken to memorialize this performance, to be able to see, say, Beverly Sills's stunning interpretation of the Queen instead of Birgit Nordin's adequate one. Several people—veterans Ragnar Ulfung (Monostatos) and Erik Saedén (Speaker), and young Håkan Hagegård (Papageno)—are close to ideal. Ulrik Cold's impressive Sarastro, while beautiful and beautifully sung, seemed, in close-ups, too young for Bergman's scheme as husband of Birgit Nordin and father of Irma Urrila. On the other hand, the whole production could have been more documentarily provincial, in which case more could have been made of the rare Drottningholm stage to maintain the historical curiosity value.

As it is, I remember half-a-dozen brilliant filmic moments—the magic portrait of Pamina, the charming jealousy antics of the three ladies, the astonishment of three real boys in a balloon (the first time they enter thus), the first time the

title cards are used, the serene moment when a priest puts his hand on Tamino's shoulder and we see a hole in his glove which suddenly makes him seem to come alive in that context when we perceive that he actually lives in these clothes, and finally Sarastro's triumphant gesture upon receiving the magic flute, which, after all, is symbolic of the beneficial powers of music, especially that *Magic Flute* of Mozart which has survived many a worse production.

—WILLIAM MORITZ

Ryan O'Neal, Gay Hamilton: the transience of the past.

BARRY LYNDON

Directed, produced, and written by Stanley Kubrick. Based on the novel by William Makepeace Thackeray. Photography: John Alcott. Warner Brothers.

"The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there," says the narrator of *The Go-Between*. The narrator of *Barry Lyndon* does not, but the film does. During its opening moments, it is hard to guess what Stanley Kubrick has in mind. In an Irish meadow, subtly photographed to bring out its full palette of storm-shadowed greens and browns, duelling pistols pop flatly and Redmond Barry's father dies, while the voice on the sound track dryly recites his cut-off prospects. Then, Redmond's mother, clad in a white peasant dress with a light halation around it solemnly steps across her rural yard and faces a vista of hills which seem to roll into infinity. At first, these two shots seem to promise a waxworks exhibit. Then the camera slowly zooms away from an ornament to reveal two cardplayers, 15-year-old Redmond Barry (Ryan O'Neal) and his cousin Nora Brady (Gay Hamilton). The flirting which follows is conventional enough: girl hides ribbon in her bodice, boy becomes too embarrassed to grope for it, girl finally helps him condescendingly. But Kubrick has paced and scored the scene like a ritual, to give it a gauzy, dreamy tone, as though it were being remembered decades later by a romantic mind struggling to review the past objectively.

The entire movie is suffused with this mood of mingled rapture and detachment, as it seeks to transport us to another era. The foreignness of the past is portrayed in *The Go-Between* through a boy's discovery of a sexual deviousness which, minor as it may appear from our twentieth-century perspective, has the power to blight his life. Similarly, Redmond Barry's extreme shyness with Nora looks downright bizarre from today's vantage point. To make us understand the things done differently there, each film uses a highly studied style. Set nearer to the present, *The Go-Between* can flash forward every now and then to its hero's old age in the twentieth century, as he ponders the source of his life's ruination. Set in the eighteenth century, *Barry Lyndon* must rely on the stately pace, the painterly framing, the detached tone, the unpsychoanalyzed characters, and the lack of dramatization which have made so many dislike it. But all these criticisms are beside the point. *Barry Lyndon* is not a drama or a character study or even a satire on the abundant human corruption which it portrays. It is, like Ozu's films though in a different way, a meditation on the transience of life.

Thackeray's novel had something else in mind: debunking the kind of lovable rogue which books like *Tom Jones* had popularized during the decades preceding its first publication in 1844. The storyline is simple. Tricked into leaving home so that Nora can marry money, Redmond Barry becomes both a British and a Prussian soldier during the Seven Years War, advances first to Prussian spy and then to itinerant society gambler under the training of his Chevalier uncle, marries the plushly wealthy Countess of Lyndon, takes

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control of her fortune, clashes with his stepson, and finally loses everything, landing in the debtor's prison from which he narrates all but the last two pages of the book. His story is an episodic chronicle of seductions, duels, card-sharping, battles, marriages, births, deaths, parliamentary campaigns, and every kind of Machiavellian scheming. Though gracefully written, it rambles too much and gets a bit too preachy underneath its flinty cynicism about the social climber's rise and fall. *The Red and the Black* and Thackeray's own *Vanity Fair* put it in the shade, and Kubrick has not bothered to be faithful to it. His ribbon scene compresses pages of the author's sexual intrigue; acres of subplots (including adventures among thieves in Dublin, an elaborate scheme to marry a well-heeled German princess, Barry's family ties to the Chevalier, and two Parliamentary elections) have been dropped; a few others (principally Barry's duel with his stepson) have been added.

One of the most obvious changes is the narration, which, in the book, Barry himself delivers in a preening, bragging style that undercuts his flattering self-portrait. But Thackeray is not Henry James; we don't have to read far past the opening line, "Since the days of Adam there has hardly been a mischief done in this world but a woman has been at the bottom of it," to get the point. The film substitutes a nameless commentator (Michael Hordern) akin to those of *The Magnificent Ambersons, Jules and Jim,* and Thackeray's closing pages. He takes care of certain routine narrative requirements. When Lady Lyndon first appears, he reels off her lineage while the images display her walking abstractedly in a Marienbad-like setting and envelop her with an aura of sadness. But, unlike the usual third-person narrator, this one is not the Voice of God; what he says often does not correspond to what the images show. For instance, his remarks about the Countess, like Barry's in the novel, generally have a jeering edge to them, which the beauty of the images completely contradicts. At other times, when he debunks the myth of the chivalric age over shots of troops burning and looting, the narration doubles what we see much as Bresson's narrations do. Minus his relentless self-justification, Barry becomes a less corrupt figure in the film; we view him and his world in a more cosmic, detached perspective. The narration ritualizes every action in the movie, embodying the way that ritual traps the characters.

Barry Lyndon is utterly the opposite of the loose, improvised movies which are so popular with many critics these days. Every detail of it is calculated; the film is as formal as a minuet. The most noticed feature of its shooting style has certainly been the reverse zoom from close-up or medium shot to extreme long shot. Obviously, this device contrasts the majestic, indifferent beauty of nature with the scurrying, greedy people who imagine themselves to be its center. But, since the movie mutes the viciousness which Thackeray analyzed and may have partly relished, this is only a secondary purpose. These zooms place humanity and its activities in a timeless perspective, highlighting their evanescence. Often, the zoom will begin with a turbulent close-up, such as duelling pistols being loaded against a background of rushing lakewater. As the focus glides into long shot, the turbulence fades. We feel it vanishing into the texture of the long shot. The photography by John Alcott is literally painting with light. The images have extraordinary depth and clarity; the colors can move us as directly as the score's classical and Irish themes. They face us not just in the homes and castles and parklands of Barry Lyndon's world but in that world itself, in its moral and intellectual ambience. It is as though the film had been shot on location in the eighteenth century.

The world of *Barry Lyndon* is a world of ceremonies: duels, formal dinners, musicales, marching, battles, card games, awards, day-to-day arrivals and departures, introductions and farewells. Like the king and his courtiers in *The Rise of Louis XIV,* the characters of *Barry Lyndon* seem to be living every moment of their lives by an elaborate code of ritual, which governs even the way they stand or walk. Choosing a world in which this complex of life-restricting ceremonies is easier to see than it is in our world, Kubrick makes ceremony a motif which expresses the restrictions life places on our aspirations. At the same time, he has taken incredible pains to make these ceremonies as detailed and as lovely

as possible; they and the natural world around them tantalize us with suggestions of infinte possibilities lying just out of reach. Though blighted, vulgar, and even ridiculous, Barry's dream of becoming a rich gentleman possesses a measure of this blocked yearning for a state of perfect bliss. The film comments on the death of these dreams even as they are born. The ribbon episode is an elegy for its own reverie of eternal love. Soon afterwards, the camera catches Barry in pensive close-up as he stares at Nora. A few harp notes lyricize his disappointment, in a way reminiscent of the oboe music which, in *Pather Panchali,* replaces a mother's scream of grief at the death of her daughter. Other than certain Bresson and Ozu films, the best precedent for the moods and techniques of *Barry Lyndon* is probably *Far from the Madding Crowd,* in which, as James Price put it, Terence Stamp, "all flashing eyes and floating hair," tried "to convey a past of honey-dew and milk of Paradise." Ryan O'Neal has clearly been cast because his face, both bland and ethereal, can suggest the same thing. Kubrick has made his blond, faintly narcissistic healthiness as opaque and remote as we will be if some similarly disposed film-maker centuries hence creates a *Barry Lyndon* about our lost universe.

A particularly revealing departure from the novel comes during Barry's encounter with Lischen, a young German farm woman whom he meets while deserting from the British Army. Barry's comment in the book reads this way:

> For, if the truth must be told, I had made a very deep love to her during my stay under her roof; as is always my way with women, of whatever age or degree of beauty. To a man who has to make his way in the world, these dear girls can always be useful in one fashion or another; never mind, if they repel your passion; at any rate, they are not offended with your declaration of it, and only look upon you with more favorable eyes in consequence of your misfortune. As for Lischen, I told her such a pathetic story of my life (a tale a great deal more romantic than that here narrated—for I do not restrict myself to the exact truth in that history, as in these pages I am bound to do), that I won the poor girl's heart entirely, and, besides, made considerable progress in the German language under her instruction. Do not think me very cruel and heartless, ladies; *this heart of Lischen's was like many a town in the neighborhood in which she dwelt, and had been stormed and occupied several times before I came to invest it;* now mounting French colors, now green and yellow Saxon, now black and white Prussian, as the case may be. *A lady who sets her heart upon a lad in uniform must prepare to change lovers pretty quickly, or her life will be but a sad one.*

Barry's crisp cynicism here, with its patronizing banter and nonchalant puns, ought to be just right for a director as misanthropic, not to mention misogynistic, as Kubrick is supposed to be. But he has transformed this episode into a soft, tender "time out of war" comparable to the concluding sequence of *Grand Illusion,* in which a sympathetic country woman shelters escaping prisoners of war.

Once again, Kubrick compresses and simplifies the novel, dropping extraneous characters and dividing the sequence into four scenes: Barry and Lischen meeting on a pastoral path, a candlelit meal during which she invites him to stay with her, Barry driving a cow toward her farmhouse at dusk, and their leavetaking. Kubrick allows the first two to run for several minutes apiece, leisurely developing the growing response of Barry and Lischen to each other. In contrast to the jaundiced description which the book provides, Lischen in the movie (Diana Koerner) has a delicate, inviting face, and the candles which light their dinner heighten the intimacy which flowers between them. The photography and the slow pacing turn the scene into an island of romantic enchantment. We sense that Barry is investing Lischen with the memory of his love for Nora, as we never do in the novel. The editing holds onto the scene just as Barry would do if only that were possible. But the joyful, privileged moment cannot last and, after keeping it on the screen for as long as he could, Kubrick then reduces the remainder of their idyll to three comparatively brief shots. The first, Barry entering the serene peasant landscape at twilight, suggests a potential state of grace; the next two show him rejecting it, as he kisses and leaves Lischen to resume his climb up the social ladder. The gentle pastels of their goodbye makes them both touchingly beautiful, as the photography

does for almost all the characters no matter how squalidly they are behaving. Over these images, the narrator utters the two italicized sentences from the novel, in reverse order, just to twist the knife. For many viewers, this touch probably undercuts the images. But the images are so dazzling that they make the words sound lying or irrelevant; we believe the camera instead of the narrator. This kind of transformation gives the film a grandeur and a poignance rarely present in the book.

Barry Lyndon contemplates death—the death of dreams, emotions, people, life itself, all swirling away in the eddies of time, like Barry's interlude of love with Lischen. Kubrick's style is based on the ability of film to capture both life and death—at one and the same instant. As Jean-Luc Godard has commented:

> Cinema is the only art which, in Cocteau's phrase, "films death at work." The person one films is growing older moment by moment and will die. One thus films a moment of death at work. Paintings are static. Cinema is interesting because it captures both life and the mortal aspect of life.

Film not only records death; it also embodies our movement toward it. The images come to life when the arc light first hits the screen, remain alive throughout their projection, die when the last of them fades out, retaining only the dim afterglow that they leave in our fading memories. Kubrick stresses the deaths of his characters much more than Thackeray did: the phony demise of Nora's cowardly fiancé during a trumped-up duel with Barry; the cold and distant passing of Barry's father; his mentor and friend, Captain Grogan, bleeding to death from battle wounds as Barry kisses him on the lips; the shattering final moments of Barry's son, Bryan. In most cases, these deaths come as no surprise to us. Either the narrator has already told us about them, or they are so obvious an outcome of the characters' activities that—except in the duels—there is never any suspense involved. The most wintry example is Barry's first taste of combat as a British infantryman marching with his comrades straight into the enemy gunfire which is brutally shredding their ranks. The film shows an entire world living and dying in ceremonial lockstep. By telling us in advance when characters are about to die, the narrator obliges us to contemplate what lies in store for us as well.

Such a portrayal of life would be unbearably grim if Kubrick had not, in counterpoint, made such magnificent images out of it. Throughout the film, he avoids a number of key story points—the "bad company" Barry is accused of falling in with by his Prussian commander, for instance, or how he becomes an expert swordsman—preferring to linger over moments which have less, often no, narrative significance: Barry chopping wood in the evening; the Prussian Captain Potzdorf (Hardy Kruger) slyly toying

BARRY LYNDON: *"An entire world living and dying in ceremonial lockstep."*

with him by palavering about "your country of England" and then lowering the boom by demanding, "Will you join and take the bounty, sir, or will you be given up?"; a powdered, rouged German prince with concave cheeks and a death's head slowly accusing the Chevalier of cheating at cards. Each of these scenes, and many others also, could, from the point-of-view of a storyteller or a dramatist, be trimmed or cut, just as so many of Thackeray's high points have been. Instead, Kubrick lavishes attention on them, making them visually bewitching. Or he will take an essential episode, such as Barry's entrapment of the Countess, and replace Thackeray's pages of detailed parry-and-thrust with one blue tracking shot of the two walking on a balcony until she yields to his kiss. Kubrick sacrifices drama, psychology, and narrative wherever possible for visual power because he wants to stress the transience of the very images and moments which he works so hard to create. His style deliberately gives the film's visual beauty an ominous, oppressive undertone. It is as though the images were trying to escape the flow of time by turning into paintings.

We get a feeling of escape from this awareness of death during certain violent moments—Barry outboxing another dragoon, rescuing Potzdorf from a burning building, strangling his stepson during a music party—when raw energy is bursting through the film's formal restraints and Kubrick switches to a handheld camera in order to plunge us into it. These outbursts are like those intense moments in life when we feel its pulse most vividly and soar into ecstasy. Along with the romantic interludes and Barry's affectionate scenes with Bryan, they are the only moments in the movie when we lose consciousness of time's passage. Each is brief; we are inexorably pulled back into formalism and ritual, into awareness of mortality. The two feelings blend powerfully at the end of Part One, when Barry confronts Lady Lyndon's aged, raddled husband, Sir Charles. Raging in a hell-red drawing room, the bitter old man rasps out his defiance of the contemptuous upstart, snarling maniacally as a stroke begins to cut him down. The narrator dispassionately reads his obituary before he dies—until a tolling musical cue and a fade-out silence them both. It was a bold choice for Kubrick to have made (Thackeray has Sir Charles linger for a year) and the result is uniquely terrifying.

A more quietly chilling moment comes a few reels earlier during Barry's baptism of fire when, over impeccably composed shots of British and French troops preparing for battle, the narrator remarks that the coming skirmish, though memorable enough to its participants, was not recorded in any history books. We cannot help thinking of the totalitarian state of 1984, which erases people by erasing their pasts; as we watch the toppling soldiers, all but Grogan anonymous to us, we are struck through with the sensation that, more than merely dying, they have never really lived. The richly detailed images of this and other scenes have been called more suitable for a museum wall than a movie screen, a comment which misses the point perfectly because it forgets that "paintings are static." Moving images exist in time; they die. The central irony of *Barry Lyndon* is that all its awesome detailing of eighteenth-century life creates not the realism of a historian but the mirage of a dreamer; the film conjures up the past only to waft it away, as though it had never existed except in fantasy. Even the candlelight scenes, shot with special lenses so that they would look exactly as they did in the eighteenth century, exist to make us realize that no one alive today has ever before seen them, because their world has vanished. They are the brief candles of life itself.

Bryan's deathbed scene brings this theme to an overpowering climax. Kubrick confounds his detractors, who belabor him for coldness, and many admirers, who try to make a virtue of this charge, by prolonging the boy's final moments of life, as though stylizing a favorite episode out of Dickens. Wrapped in gauze, Bryan is already a mummy, reminiscent of the frozen astronauts in *2001,* as he feels his limbs going numb. Barry is helpless to cope with this vision of destroyed hope; all he can do is blurt out a desperate description of his glory days on the battlefield when Bryan asks him for a story. As Bryan grasps the hands of his parents and makes them promise to stop fighting so that they will be able to rejoin him in heaven, the film becomes incandescent

with the beauty of his naive wish. Yet, at the same moment, our minds hurtle back to the dying Grogan saying to Barry, "Kiss me, for we'll never meet again." The film is a funeral ode to the charms of existence.

Unlike Thackeray, Kubrick allows Barry to comprehend this, if only for a moment. In the novel, he remains an egomaniac to the end, never concerned about the havoc he has caused throughout his travesty of a life. Switching to the third person, Thackeray laconically reports that Barry's stepson, Lord Bullingdon, reappears and thrashes him. Kubrick has replotted the story; now Bullingdon demands satisfaction, and the two meet for a duel. Like so much of the movie, this sequence is an elaborate ceremony, decorous on the surface, murderous just beneath it; the dry-as-dust rhetoric of the duel's referee—"Are you ready to receive Lord Bullingdon's fire?"—and his steadfast attention to the rules are profoundly horrifying. Kubrick builds it methodically, riveting us to the spectacle for what seems like a near-eternity. But Bullingdon, unable to hide his fear of death, trembles and vomits, botching the rituals like a terrified altar boy. Barry, on the other hand, drifts through the ceremony in a virtual trance. When Bullingdon's terror makes him miss a shot, Barry has the opportunity to destroy his most relentless enemy and salvage his status. Yet, haunted by the memory of his own dead child, he fires into the ground and allows Bullingdon the second shot which annihilates the remnants of everything he has striven for in life. Barry's love for Bryan, though corrupted by selfishness and egotism, had been his one surviving shred of human decency; now it ruins him, yet briefly ennobles him in the same stroke.

Kubrick makes neither a triumph nor a tragedy of this, as he lets the film fade away throm a series of intentional anticlimaxes. But Barry's moment of transcendence is a genuine affirmation, and so is the passionate dedication to filmmaking which Kubrick has poured into this magnificent work. Neither may be the traditional religious or liberal-humanist sorts of affirmation, but they are truthful and comforting nonetheless. There are a handful of flaws: a miscalculation in eliminating Barry's personal relationship to the Chevalier, perhaps a bit too much reliance on the planes of Marisa Berenson's gaunt face and the pools of her melancholy eyes to suggest Lady Lyndon's psychological entrapment. But I mention them no more than dutifully; they don't matter. *Barry Lyndon* may be a death song; but it is a song, and an eloquent one. I am grateful for its existence. —MICHAEL DEMPSEY

BUFFALO BILL AND THE INDIANS

Produced and directed by Robert Altman, from the screen story by Alan Rudolph and Altman, based on the play "Indians" by Arthur Kopit. Music: Richard Baskin. United Artists.

Robert Altman has always had a keen eye for the plight of the disenfranchised soul, from the lonely romanticized idealist of *Brewster McCloud* to the foolhardy businessman of *McCabe and Mrs. Miller.* Perhaps as an ironic salute to the bicentennial, Altman turns his gaze to the other end of the spectrum, where Buffalo Bill Cody resides in comfortable, self-assured splendor.

This time, however, Altman almost loses himself to a maze of philosophical attitudes and a multilevel story. *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, Or, Sitting Bull's History Lesson* works as the emotional story of an illegitimate myth. It is a sophisticated rendering of feelings that first found voice in the exuberant, if cartoonlike, *Brewster McCloud*; a strangely elegant appraisal of inequity.

Where it doesn't work is in the various attempts at conscious intellectualizing which appear here for the first time in Altman's films. Action is frequently forsaken for discussion about the action, and Altman simply doesn't do as well with cerebral conversations as he does with interactions and activity.

In fact, some of the more leaden lines of dialogue—the kind that usually frighten the audience into muttering them over and over again, waiting for a revelation, because they seem so significant—are a backwards compliment to Altman's vivacious way with a story, because they seem so out of place in what is otherwise a harsh,

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effective film. When Altman lets his story roll, naturally, it awakens feelings about history, lies, and legends that have meaning in all times. When he balks, and strikes a pose to articulate in words what he has already expressed through the organic development of his story, the subtle bond is broken and we become aware of the spaces between ourselves, the screen, and the words.

What Altman examines in *Buffalo Bill* is the building of legends, heroes of American history who were always white, usually male, and undeniably omnipotent. Men such as Buffalo Bill did not ascend to power unassisted, nor did they always merit their position. They come complete with an entourage of money-sucking parasites, upwardly mobile sycophants, and, most important, willing throngs who find strange comfort in a god on earth. Altman recognizes the complexities of myth-making and realizes that a simplistic, heroes-and-villains approach, even with the usual roles reversed, would be as flat and foolish as the original legend.

So he chooses the most telling method of revising our sense of history: he lets the legend live right in front of us, stumbling around in its own idiocy. With just the slightest prompting, Buffalo Bill and his fantasy merchants expose the decay at the core of "the show business," whether it be Bill's show, President Grover Cleveland's show, or any one of the current political sideshows that draw our attention away from real issues.

Paul Newman is perfectly cast as a legend playing a legend. Counting on Newman's own elevated status, and through it insinuating that the American film industry follows in the brash footsteps of its wild west ancestor, Altman introduces Bill as a man purely entranced by his own image, a man who has succeeded in forgetting the distinction between reality and a wild west sideshow. The film's audience has expectations of a star like Newman, just as the folks in the bleachers revere Buffalo Bill: Altman aims to upset yesterday and today simultaneously.

When we meet Bill, the sharp edges of his memories are further blurred by alcohol; he has forgotten what he has actually lived and what has been created for him by writer Ned Buntline (Burt Lancaster). At the beginning of *Buffalo Bill* Buntline, forced into exile because he knows best the artificiality of Bill's life, waits at the edge of "the national entertainment family" for a final confrontation with his invention. Bill is surrounded instead by fast-talking carpetbaggers, men whose arrogant facile nature is expressed by their love of contrived figures of speech. They are literally incapable, it seems, of having a directed conversation with one another. His women, for the most part, shun speech altogether in favor of songs only they can understand.

What topples this tower of Babel is, eerily enough, pure silence. Sitting Bull is another kind of legend, one who has lived his life with his people. He has no reason to participate in the sham of Codyland beyond a dream that he will meet the President there. His amused indifference at Bill's shenanigans is enough to jolt Bill back to vulnerability, to remind him that the public shell has consumed the man.

The impact of *Buffalo Bill,* though, does not come from the ideological differences between Bill and Sitting Bull, as articulated by Buntline. Buntline actually seems an intrusion, lacking the individuality and purpose that made Rene Auberjonois's professor such an integral part of *Brewster McCloud.* Buntline is saying things that the audience can feel unassisted, and the additional explanations are irritating and unnecessary.

Rather, the film's energy stems from Altman's ability to make ideas accessible through feelings. Most of his characters are so vivid, so brightly drawn, that they reach into the distance between theater seat and screen. The progression from a character's feelings, into dialogue, into the viewer's thoughts, and finally into the viewer's emotional response, is too elaborate. Altman has an uncanny knack for seducing the audience into caring for the people on screen without giving conscious thought to the relationship: when he works his message through emotional channels it is almost impossible to ignore. Sitting Bull's stern faith can elicit sympathy and support, while Bill and his merry men bring us to anger and hostility at their undeserved status.

Near the film's end Altman recognizes where his strength lies, and uses a single, direct confrontation to expand the story's significance. Standing in front of his own portrait, Bill speaks

to his vision of Sitting Bull. "Ain't he ridin' that horse right? Well, if he ain't—how come all of you took him for a king?" In his mind, Bill may be speaking to Bull's image and the people who work in the show. But the camera steps between Bill and the Indian, and suddenly Bill's accusatory tone is directed at us. We have enjoyed the thrill of the double sideshow—Bill's own show, and Altman's show of that show—only to be faced with the ease with which we entered into the dream.

It is a jarring moment, primarily because the style of the rest of the film, and Newman's interpretation of even Bill's less lucid moments, is so carefully modulated. Altman saves his multitrack sound system for the most appropriate moments in *Buffalo Bill*—to convey the superficiality of the business office, to belittle a group of self-impressed men by having their words come out like vegetable soup, to point up the difference between what Annie Oakley and Frank look like to the audience and to each other.

He also utilizes silence with a new, deft respect. In one exquisite sequence where the chief appears before Grover Cleveland's party, Altman moves from the boisterous actions and sounds of the spectator's box to the chief astride the dancing grey. The sound dims for an instant, followed by the flute and harp that provide music at the reception scene which follows.

For the slightest moment Altman captures the chief, smiling to an inner melody while the mare performs, satisfied with his reality and oblivious to the trappings of a false society. Flamboyance will always be a part of Altman's approach but, just as he finds fault with Bill's highly theatrical, overblown sideshow, he seems to be looking for a personal sense of subtlety and restraint.

The negative side to his exploration, however, is a seeming distrust of methods he has used successfully in other films. An overdependence on words is one unfortunate consequence. Another is a shadowy, weak environment which is not strong enough to sustain our involvement; the film is astonishingly set-bound compared to most of Altman's work. As befits a story about power and phoniness, none of the characters save Bill and Sitting Bull seem to have a past or a future. We can imagine that Nate (Joel Grey) was imported from the east coast, but little more; it is impossible to decipher who the Major (Kevin McCarthy) was or is, between his never-combed, never-bathed appearance and his extravagant alliterative vocabulary. Even Annie (Geraldine Chaplin) is a mystery, a little girl with medals on her chest, a sling on her arm, and an inexplicable affection for Sitting Bull. Left to their own devices, each actor fashions a physical presence for his or her character, but the veneer is thin and there's nothing behind it.

The inference, it seems, is that these characters have dissolved; they abandoned their personalities when they signed on with Cody's Wild West show, and were born anew as members of the company. No one cares, or thinks about, what they would become if they left Bill's world.

The concept is appropriate to Altman's disdain for dummied reality, surely. The blankness behind the faces, however, detracts from the tenacious air of irreverent optimism that wafts at the edges of *Buffalo Bill.* Bill is undone by the sureness of a silent man, a determined woman, and a cynical tired writer, without ever comprehending his fate. But their motivations are unclear, and, therefore, their deeds and encounters unconvincing.

Altman seems to harbor a kind of hatred for his own medium. The final duel scene, much like the surrealistic credit sequence that ends *Brewster McCloud,* glints like an evil dream, the director's final cruel look at the universal sideshow of which he has become a part. In the past, the feeling has been channeled, productively, into Marlowe's tired cynicism, or the telling emptiness beneath the jive of *California Split,* or the whirlwind pacing that made *Nashville* at once terrifying and entertaining. In *Buffalo Bill,* unfortunately, the contradiction lurches into the story's territory, as Altman hesitantingly chooses words over deeds in an attempt to deny what he does best. As Sitting Bull knows, and Bill never learns, you can lose yourself forever in all the talking.

—KAREN STABINER

THE TRAITORS

A film by Grupo Cine de la Base, Argentina, 1973. Distributed by Tricontinental Film Center.

When it was released in 1973, the Argentine feature *The Traitors* coincided with a spate of "political" films then in vogue in Europe and the United States. Certain formulaic elements of hard-hitting action, along with the film's focus on corruption and betrayal, strategy and counter-strategy, provide a superficial resemblance with such films as Costa-Gavras's *State of Siege* or David Miller's *Executive Action.* Rather than focusing on historical personalities, however, this film places fictional characters—paradoxically more "real" since their fictional nature is a composite of many actual people and events—in the complex world of Argentine labor politics over the nearly two decades between Juan Perón's outster in 1955 and the events just preceding his return from exile in 1973.

The circumstances of the film's production and the role it has played on the Argentine political scene since its release distinguish it from commercial "thrillers," no matter how committed in inspiration. Produced clandestinely by the Grupo Cine de la Base, cooperatively financed and distributed outside of established circuits by the same group, the autonomy of *The Traitors* prevents it from being assimilated or neutralized by the system it criticizes. Despite the inevitable financial and technical limitations of this kind of production, *The Traitors* is one of the more technically ambitious and politically urgent films to come out of the Third World. It is a color production with a large cast and complex plot structure which intercuts three levels of action: a kidnapping scheme, a series of flashbacks detailing the personal life and political career of the "victim," and a group of documentary sequences which evoke the major events in national history over the same 17-year period. In this way, the film effectively integrates the individual experience with the historical overview.

Roberto Barrera is a Perónist union boss who faces the first serious challenge to his power. A group of militant young workers, also loyal to Perón, are staging a series of wildcat factory take-overs and proposing an opposition slate in the imminent union elections. Barrera, seeking both his own perpetuation in power and revenge against the insurgents, engineers his own disappearance. While he enjoys a four-day interlude at a remote vacation house in the company of his lover, his presumed kidnapping is attributed to the rival faction, whose leaders are abducted and tortured. As he toasts his landslide election victory on the day following his "release," he is gunned down as a traitor to his class and constituency by militants of his own union. In the act of that assassination, these workers become guerrillas, deserting the electoral arena for that of armed struggle.

This final step in their political evolution has a kind of ironic circularity in light of what the film reveals of Barrera's first political activity. In response to Perón's overthrow and the subsequent curtailment of workers' power and representation, the young Barrera engages in indiscriminate terrorist attacks against the military. It is his father who insists that organizing the workers is a more constructive political strategy. Suspecting the deception behind Barrera's fortuitous disappearance and more fortuitous return, his own father joins the militant cell as it decides to adopt the strategy of organized violence. Barrera's progressive corruption and betrayal has driven those who justly oppose his hegemony to a course which is a more refined version of his own strategy in his days of genuine commitment to the workers' cause.

The film detail the progression of Barrera's corruption—from the cases of managerial booze bestowed upon him in honor of his election victory, to his decision to make the union a profit-making venture by running a numbers game among its members, to his elaborate scheme to share a cut of the workers' lay-off compensation with management in exchange for deciding who should be laid off. More concerned with the historical and social causes and consequences of individual action than with inner motivation, the film never attempts—like Bertolucci's *The Conformist,* for example—to plumb the depths of the psyche. Never, that is, with the exception of a single dream sequence whose surrealistic tone and absurdist humor are strik-

ingly out of key with the only occasionally expressionistic realism of the rest of the film.

Though the practical takes precedence over the psychological, the structure and content of the film make a continual connection between the public and the private, between Barrera's political stance and events in his personal life. When Barrera, who has courageously served the interests and needs of the workers as a union delegate and consistently refused the bribes of the management, is finally won over by the prospect of real power as the elected head of the union, he begins to "pay" immediately. His first concession—a small and strategic one—is to put a stop to the production slowdown on the grounds that any opposition to management's speed-up policies might reduce the chances for re-legalization of the union. This decision distresses his girlfriend, Paloma, who intuits his compromise and realizes its implications. Her silent censure angers Barrera. Upon his election, Paloma is replaced by Chela, whom Barrera officially designates as his fiancée. Paloma is visually associated with Barrera's humble origins (a drab room much like the one in his parents' home, a sad grassy spot under a railroad trestle); Chela, on the other hand, who is always dressed with a certain flashy elegance, is an emblem of Barrera's new status. In the house she has so pretentiously decorated (she measures books by the meter and displays them for their ornamental appeal), Chela bears and raises Barrera's children. Paloma, on the other hand, is escorted down grimy streets into the ramshackle patio of the abortionist. Barrera tries to retain both women, symbolic of what he was and what he has become, but Paloma deserts him before their tryst is over. The film wisely refrains from giving her dicision a political motivation. Still unaware of his kidnapping strategem, she deserts him on purely personal grounds; but the opportunism and self-interest which drive her away parallel Barrera's opportunistic manipulation of his political constituency.

In the context of a Latin American film movement which has increasingly abandoned conventional fictional forms for a variety of documentary techniques—the didactic film essay (Solanas and Getino's *The Hour of the Furnaces*), the "interpretive documentary" (Littín's *The Jackal of Nahueltoro*) or the historical reconstruction (Sanjinés' *The Courage of the People*)—this film stands out for the traditionality of its narrative and visual style. The film seems to strive for the same "invisible" visual articulation generally associated with classical Hollywood cinema. Two beliefs motivate this choice of form: that narrative cinema is most accessible to the working-class audience to which the film is directed, and that fiction film offers a greater potential for synthesis and a personalized, in-depth view than the external perspective of public or documentary sources. Focusing as it does on the life of a single individual over many years, the film raises problems of identification and continuity. The abruptness of Barrera's assassination is not mitigated by either the surrealistic foreshadowing of the dream sequence where he attends his own funeral, or by any emotional association between the audience and the executioners, since the militants are many and much more sketchily delineated than their enemy. The film-makers' political commitment and their sense of the obviousness and urgency of the current Argentine situation motivate their emphasis on the corrupt bureaucrat and their comparative failure to portray the human dimension of the opposition. The sheer size of the latter clouds certain plot transitions. (For example, the tie between the workers whom Barrera conspires to have laid off and the formation of the militant opposition cell is not immediately apparent.) To see these militants subjected to beatings and torture, to see one of them brutally murdered, does not make them any more "real." Whereas Barrera's unctuousness and increasingly bombastic public rhetoric are criticized through the very mode with which they are conveyed in the film, the absence of this critical perspective when portraying the over-rhetorical and over-simplified discussions among the militants reduces the credibility of the film and dilutes its impact. The workers—with the exception of one woman whose humiliation at the hands of a company physician generates a high degree of empathy—remain cardboard characters despite the justice of their cause; Barrera, for all his despicableness, is overwhelmingly convincing and "real."

Those who make up the Cine de la Base group

see themselves as militant political activists first, film-makers second. The fact that this film was conceived and produced as a mobilization device at the service of the militant labor groups who continue to screen it clandestinely makes an "independent" critical appraisal at best irrelevant. The film is directed at the base, and its efficacy and impact can only be measured there. In a country which currently averages one political assasination every 15 hours, in a society dominated by an authoritarian populist ideology (Peronism) whose long-suppressed contradictions have now given way to virtual civil war, the most significant critical observation may well be to note that subsequent events—specifically Peron's betrayal of the left and the workers' movements whose support were essential to his return—both clarify and vindicate the film.

—JULIANNE BURTON

THE MAN FROM MAISINICÚ

Director: Manuel Perez. Screenplay: Manuel Perez. Editing: Gloria Arguelles. Production: ICAIC.

When *The Man from Maisinicú* begins, Alberto Delgado Delgado, administrator of the state farm at Maisinicú, is dead, hanged from a limb in a forested region of Cuba called the Escambray, a stranghold of counterrevolutionary bandits in the years following the invasion of the Bay of Pigs. (Narration contends the bandits are supported by the CIA, which is hoping to establish a base for a new invasion.) The film consists of piecing together the puzzle of the murder. Told in flashbacks in a style that simulates documentary, *The Man from Maisinicú* is clearly influenced by the Mediterranean genre of the melodrama of political repression in the manner of *The Battle of Algiers*. It is an excellent film, and if it were as compelling as *Algiers*, if it told the story of the hairbredth exploits of many revolutionaries and not one, it might ascend to the same acclaim *Algiers* enjoys here.

THE MAN FROM MAISINICÚ

The staging of exterior scenes in the farms, forests, mountains, and beaches of Cuba owes even more to the Cinema Novo of Brazil. Manuel Perez, whose first film this is, absorbed much from Glauber Rocha's conversion of deserts and hillsides into grandiose stages for grandiose histrionics. Curiously the film seems least influenced by the powerful graphic sense of many Cuban films that makes them sometimes appear to be six revolutionary posters in search of an animator.

Set almost exclusively among counterrevolutionaries (taking the virtues of the revolution for granted) *The Man from Maisinicú*, though contemporary and "documentary" is a western, not because the good guy, Delgado, rides the only horse and administers a ranch, but because he is a loner, an ambiguous moral figure in an out-of-doors action melodrama in which all the other major figures are similarly representative of historical dilemmas. The masses represent figures in a historical, as well as geographical, landscape.

The story concerns a revolutionary soldier, Delgado, secretly discharged from the army into G-2, the Cuban intelligence agency. He is returned to civilian society through a mental institution, an apparent victim of "nerves," a hair-trigger malcontent. He infiltrates the counterrevolution through his brother-in-law, a free enterprise auto mechanic. Trading on his military good conduct (that ended only with the ill-defined

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THE MAN FROM MAISINICÚ

The staging of exterior scenes in the farms, forests, mountains, and beaches of Cuba owes even more to the Cinema Novo of Brazil. Manuel Perez, whose first film this is, absorbed much from Glauber Rocha's conversion of deserts and hillsides into grandiose stages for grandiose histrionics. Curiously the film seems least influenced by the powerful graphic sense of many Cuban films that makes them sometimes appear to be six revolutionary posters in search of an animator.

Set almost exclusively among counterrevolutionaries (taking the virtues of the revolution for granted) *The Man from Maisinicú*, though contemporary and "documentary" is a western, not because the good guy, Delgado, rides the only horse and administers a ranch, but because he is a loner, an ambiguous moral figure in an out-of-doors action melodrama in which all the other major figures are similarly representative of historical dilemmas. The masses represent figures in a historical, as well as geographical, landscape.

The story concerns a revolutionary soldier, Delgado, secretly discharged from the army into G-2, the Cuban intelligence agency. He is returned to civilian society through a mental institution, an apparent victim of "nerves," a hair-trigger malcontent. He infiltrates the counterrevolution through his brother-in-law, a free enterprise auto mechanic. Trading on his military good conduct (that ended only with the ill-defined

case of "nerves") he gains an appointment as administrator of the farm at Maisinicú, a base from which he contacts rural counterrevolutionary units. Initially he supplies them with meager amounts of ammunition from a source he identifies only by the pseudonym, Sanchez. Later he conducts an underground railroad by which self-styled "majors" and their cadres are dispatched to Miami. Two parties follow his lead to the cast, but a third "major" (ironically named Cheito, little Ché) becomes suspicious, demands proof that his predecessors reached Florida, an explanation of Delgado's consistent success in eluding G-2, and the real identity of Sanchez. Delgado cannot satisfy him on any point. Cheito concludes he is a government agent and executes him.

The story is not told chronologically. Perez has no apparent interest in emphasizing the heroic aspect of Delgado's calculated self-sacrifice with anything so bourgeois as a conventional, motivated narrative. The fascination with motivated behavior, with identification with a single political being, is a liberal, not a radical conceit, ill-suited to revolutionary politics. Instead Perez employs a complicated structure by which survivors of the counterrevolutionary band of Delgado's brother-in-law are captured one by one, revealing through their testimony the events leading to the assassination.

The structure generates recurrent motifs: pursuit and capture of each counterrevolutionary shot by hand-held camera and dynamically edited; a march of the captive and his guard down an anonymous Kafka-esque hallway, disappearing into an interrogation cell. We never see the interior of the cell nor the procedures by which the testimony is adduced. Rather the testimony is entirely reenacted in long takes, wide angles, and slow pans that give the landscape the spatial and temporal integrity of a stage (as in Cinema Novo) and the performers the wonderful opportunity to evince common characters in uncommon situations. These sequences each culminate in the dispatch of one of the three bandit majors, ending with an English voice-over enumeration of the particular crimes attributed to him by the revolutionary government, in whose hands he apparently reposes.

The opening credit sequence is an animated puzzle in which the outline of a face is filled in piece by piece to a song that eulogizes the man with no face. A tail credit contributed by Fidel Castro praises the revolutionaries who gave their lives anonymously.

This film, along with four others from Cuba, was to have been featured as an homage to the Cuban cinema at Filmex, the Los Angeles International Film Exposition. The US State Department denied visas to the Cuban filmmakers, who were to have accompanied the films. They in turn withdrew permission to screen them publicly. It is impossible to suppress the observation that Henry Kissinger has apparently forgotten why he left Germany in the first place.

—MITCH TUCHMAN

DIARIES, NOTES AND SKETCHES Volume I ("Lost, Lost, Lost")

A film by Jonas Mekas. 1975.

Lost now becomes the first volume of Mekas's *Diaries;* Volume II, titled *In Between,* is in the process of being edited and will probably be released sometime this year. The volume already in distribution, *Walden,* now becomes part three of the continuing autobiography in film. A necessary supplement to the longer work (and also Mekas's first film to systematically exploit his older footage) is *Reminiscences of a Voyage to Lithuania,* which in a real way links together *Lost* and *Walden,* both chronologically in terms of production and thematically in terms of central concerns.

> "Yes, I was there, and I recorded it—with my camera—for others . . . for those who do not know the pain of exile."

Lost begins with some of the first footage the newly arrived Mekas brothers shot with their first Bolex. (Some of the footage in the *Diaries* is invariably shot by others; paradoxically, its inclusion generally tends to make the work even more personal.) We see DPs (displaced persons) arriving in New York, we see Brooklyn as the postwar immigrants experienced it; we see Lithuanian school children, Lithuanian weddings. We see first spring in a new land, in bright colors which show

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both an interest in a new technique (an interesting sidelight of *Lost* is to watch color stocks and techniques change gradually over the decade covered by the film) and in the very strangeness of familiar colors in a totally new surrounding.

"How beautiful is this music. But this music was written by Chopin—in exile—in Paris."

The end of Volume I will find Mekas in Manhattan, in the very center of the New York avant-garde film activity, with *Film Culture* firmly established, making "Flaherty-style documentaries," and fighting against censorship. *Lost* is concerned with this trajectory. An important point on the journey from the Immigration Offices to the heyday of independent New York film screenings and production occurs between reels two and three in *Lost*. Reel two ends with the first English song lyrics on the sound track: a tango, "Kiss of Fire." Mekas describes his feeling that if anything has to be done for Lithuania, it would be accomplished by Lithuanians—not a declaration of being an "American," but certainly of being "not not-American." "Kiss of Fire" is not only shocking for being the first period American music on the film; part of its impact springs from its position—Mekas will abandon Brooklyn (Lithuania, or rather the *hope* of Lithuania regained) for Manhattan (the United States, being not a stranger, if not exactly "at home"). "I know that I must have your kiss that dooms me/That consumes me/Your kiss of fire." The kiss here is not sexual, but cultural, and the move away from old friends and relatives dooms Mekas as it restores him through acculturation. All of these connotations are present, but with a delicious if disturbing irony which arises through the very datedness of the kitsch music and lyrics.

Mekas's sound tracks in general and his use of music in particular have developed to an astonishing degree of harmony and complexity. These images are shaped and transformed by the narration, sound recordings, and music, and yet the images remain—these images. A minor but perfect example is orchestration combined with types of people and rhythms in "A Lithuanian Wedding in Brooklyn" (near the end of reel one). As the music changes texture, so do people and social roles. But the most complex interaction of image and sound occurs with the film-makers' own narration, complete with sounds of setting up, ambient noises, and a very close microphone presence. The rhythms of Mekas's voice are impossible to notate (I have tried the useful but too definite device of dashes in my quotations), but at times the effects of his uneven pauses and suspended intonations run an entire scale of feelings evoked through the combination of delay (pauses) and absolute presence (close miking, ambient noise).

"There is very little known of these years of our protagonist's life . . . He used to take long, long, walks. He felt very close—to the park—to the streets—to the city."

The relation of narration to image can change. Tone can shift from rhetorical questioning to intimate confession; irony sometimes lurks beneath the surface of expository remarks. And Mekas occasionally speaks of himself in the third person, as above and in a particularly touching moment, where the referent of "he" can be either a person or an abstraction:

"He had this habit of attaching himself to any place. He used to joke: Drop me anyplace, in a desert—and come back in a week and you'll find me—with my roots deep and wide."

A prejudice of criticism in the twentieth century is attention to the "telling" and not the "tale." It should be said, plainly, that Jonas Mekas has led a life of extraordinary interest and that his autobiography is not merely interesting for "how it is put together," but also (and perhaps primarily) for the intensely personal relationship of the teller to the tale: of a life to itself. A central part of Mekas's life *is* cinematic style, however, and one can follow the changes of shooting procedures from beginning to end of *Lost* with an interest that is both biographical and aesthetic. The somber, almost neorealist shooting of the beginning gradually is eclipsed by faster movement, more extremes of angle and distance, and finally by single-framing (shooting frames or groups of frames at a time, leaving gaps in the original movement).

"It was a Flaherty morning . . . and we were the monks of the Order of Cinema."

This volume of the *Diaries* is *Lost,* and the next one will be *In Between.* But in Volume I we can see the seeds of an order finding itself in the

midst of the psychic chaos of expatriation: The Order of Cinema. Religious references are frequent in this film, and one could catalogue with them the pantheistic flavor of many passages describing parks, trees, and open water. One particularly striking use of cinema itself to indicate the pathway to the Order of Cinema is set in a park. Near the end of reel one, we see Lithuanians outdoors, happy and active. On the sound track, Mekas describes the feeling of most of his fellow expatriates that "This is only temporary." Almost immediately, without change of locale, the image shifts to black and white, and the commentary created by this shift is clear: those who think they can "go back" will lose the hope of finding some new way of putting their lives together, the "kiss" that destroys but partially rebuilds.

This film is "lost" in that it studies "what remains." Mekas mentions several times film that has been lost, periods which are hard to describe or remember, feelings that are hard to recreate. An interesting corollary to the "found footage" aspect of this volume of the *Diaries* is the progression created by the very material condition of its disparate original "sources." Some of the footage is quite worn, some not; some is clear and well processed, some appears to be second-generation printing. We even get an occasional changeover dot left over from some other film context. This work is a gathering together, an assembly of artifacts which will bind together in a circle to define their center, their creator.

"These are—some images—and some sounds—recorded by someone—in exile."

Autobiography is a curious form in any medium, and most critical theory is inadequate for a reasonable appraisal of someone's life story. At one point in a markedly hostile review entitled "Objections to the New American Cinema," Dwight MacDonald made a curiously penetrating comment: "Like the Beat litterateurs, the movie makers of the New American Cinema are moralists rather than artists." MacDonald took the work "moralist," obviously, in a close and pejorative sense. But broadened to the sense of the French *moraliste*, and to the spirit of Montaigne and self-examination, one can indeed call the autobiographical strain in much New American Cinema "moralistic." Mekas, in particular, has an almost essay-like style (complete with "revisions" like Montaigne's) with a reflexive and sometimes ironic view of "subject describing subject."

"We started out—we continued—to write. We wanted to be—writers."

In a real sense, the project of Jonas Mekas's work is to document and analyze both himself as documenter and analyzer and himself as subject of documentation and analysis. It is this form that I take to be Mekas's final type of "writing," a writing in film. The writing is in printed texts: the central portions of diary manuscripts, generally three lines unreadable as sentences but provocative for what is absent, and in the titles. The writing is the interaction of all elements of the film, including natural sound, music, and order of images. Finally, and most importantly, Mekas and the camera are one, and the French critics' famous *camera-stylo* pales when compared to the union Jonas Mekas-Bolex as *recording device*, as "pen."

Lost is a particularly moving film because of the distance between the Jonas Mekas who shot—who wrote—the footage used in the work and the Jonas Mekas who assembled it in the 1970's. In this distance lies the material for powerful interactions between levels of experience. This volume, now the "first," involves the greatest gap that the artist will bridge in assembling his autobiography. No part of the work can go "before" that first Bolex. Mekas has met the challenge of such an undertaking splendidly, and this is an epic yet "writerly" beginning to his *Diaries*.

—ALAN WILLIAMS

THE DEVIL'S CLEAVAGE

A film by George Kuchar, 1975. Thomas Brothers, 135 Edgewood, San Francisco, Calif. 94117.

Cinema is blood, is tears, violence, hate, death, and love. —DOUGLAS SIRK[1]

History repeats itself, Karl Marx once observed, adding: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. Film history repeats itself with George Kuchar's *The Devil's Cleavage*, except the first time is wasn't tragedy, it was melodrama. Speci-

midst of the psychic chaos of expatriation: The Order of Cinema. Religious references are frequent in this film, and one could catalogue with them the pantheistic flavor of many passages describing parks, trees, and open water. One particularly striking use of cinema itself to indicate the pathway to the Order of Cinema is set in a park. Near the end of reel one, we see Lithuanians outdoors, happy and active. On the sound track, Mekas describes the feeling of most of his fellow expatriates that "This is only temporary." Almost immediately, without change of locale, the image shifts to black and white, and the commentary created by this shift is clear: those who think they can "go back" will lose the hope of finding some new way of putting their lives together, the "kiss" that destroys but partially rebuilds.

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fically, it was those amazing Hollywood melodramas of the forties and fifties: films that somehow made you terribly conscious of the shape of Rock Hudson's jaw or Robert Stack's mouth; films that featured actresses cast to type—Ava Gardner, Dorothy Malone, Susan Hayward, Joan Crawford, Barbara Stanwyck, Lana Turner, and Lauren Bacall.

Kuchar's lovingly farcical re-creation of those melodramas is a camp parody that sometimes directly steals from the genre, sometimes burlesques it, and often travesties it. As you might expect, it soon begins to mock all kinds of cinematic references, from Hitchcock to Preminger. But leave the exact details to pedants, laughter's the thing here. From the opening titles with their swiggling stars and booming Hollywood orchestra, to a wonderfully inconclusive and arbitrary ending almost two hours later, Juchar manages terribly well in terms of imagination and inventivenes, and just plain terribly in terms of such humdrum details of filming as using a light meter and tape recorder. Technical ineptness aside, we end up with a marvelous hybrid, as if Fuller and von Sternberg had collaborated in shooting a script by Tennessee Williams and Russ Meyer. Which is to say that excess is the most basic element of Kuchar's method, even when (almost paradoxically) it's an excess of cliché ("Such language! Bite your tongue!" "Bite it for me. . . . ."). Kuchar piles it on: tacky apartments are peopled with sleazy characters whose conversations become confessions, that, once begun, continue and continue and continue.

The result is a kind of humor often dismissed as adolescent. And it is. But it's also a joking that calls scatology what it is—shit. That's the problem: to get at the truth, you have to put up with the idiosyncrasies. Which is to say that Kuchar belongs to that vein of recent American comic imagination embodied in Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, the Firesign Theater, and much of the underground comix. It's excessive: it doesn't always work. But when it does, it says what no one else is saying.

This may explain why George Kuchar and his twin brother, Mike, who have been making films since adolescence some twenty years ago, remain left out of most discussions of the current film avant-garde. They're not only originally from the

George Kuchar and Ainslee Pryor at work.

Bronx, but they don't hide it. And they can hardly be squeezed into formalist discussions, not with lines like, "I've read too many Arlene Dahl beauty books and Polly Bergan Oil of the Turtle ads to back out now." Actually, if we want a good analysis of *The Devil's Cleavage*, we can look at those critics who held up for acclaim that string of fifties weepie films by Douglas Sirk that Kuchar is parodying: *Magnificent Obsession, All That Heaven Allows, Written on the Wind, Tarnished Angels, Imitation of Life.*

> The essence of Sirkian cinema is the direct confrontation of all material, however fanciful and improbable. Even in his most dubious projects, Sirk never shrinks away from the ridiculous, but by a full-bodied formal development, his art transcends the ridiculous, as form comments on content.
>
> —ANDREW SARRIS[2]

> . . . By altering the rhetoric of the bourgeois melodrama, through stylisation and parody, Sirk's films distanciate themselves from the bourgeois ideology.
>
> —PAUL WILLEMEN[3]

Substitute "George Kuchar" for "Sirk" in the above quotes and you have a more than plausible

analysis. The scene of a woman raping a man: isn't it ("however fanciful and improbable") an example of art transcending the merely "ridiculous, as form comments on content"? And how's this for "altering the rhetoric of the bourgeois melodrama": "Do you expect me to commit adultery for the sixth time this week?" Which isn't to say that Sirk enthusiasts can't articulate what they mean (though I have my doubts about these two), but rather to point out that if you look at something long enough, it begins to gain qualities it never had (a sort of intellectual Heisenberg uncertainty principle). Especially Sirk; even Kuchar.

Perhaps, just perhaps, melodrama has reached a limit. The current models are running pretty thin. *Once Is Not Enough* tried to shock us with the revelation that a Norman Mailerish writer is . . . is . . . impotent! and The Richest Woman In The World a . . . a . . . lesbian! If that's the best that Hollywood can come up with, it's no wonder that *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* is such a success. Which isn't to say that melodrama is dead—not with Truffaut's *Adele H.* still in release. But it is to say that a style is dead, and that's what Kuchar's film burlesques. Sirk tells us, "cinema is blood, is tears, violence, hate, death, and love." Kuchar reminds us that cinema, like life, is also bedpans, earwax, sleazy fantasy, ineptness, compromise, and laughter.

CHUCK KLEINHANS

NOTES

1. Quotes in Rainer Werner Fassbinder, "Six Films by Douglas Sirk," tr. Thomas Elsaesser, in *Douglas Sirk*, ed. Laura Mulvey and Jon Halliday (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Film Festival, 1972), p. 95. First published in *Fersehen und Film*, no. 2, February, 1971.
2. *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-1968* (NY: Dutton, 1968), pp. 109-110.
3. "Distanciation and Douglas Sirk," *Douglas Sirk*, ed. cit., p. 29, and *Screen*, 12:2 (Summer, 1971), p. 67.

carrie agins jack agins michael anderson marie ashton scott bartlett gil bea ch mary beams stephen beck adam becket coni beeson robert breer jame s broughton betty chen shirley clarke bruce conner karen crommie david crommie sally cruikshank the committee nedra deen donna deitch johann a demetrakas tom dewitt robert dvorak ed emshwiller freude virginia giritl ian green mountain post films barbara hammer yvonne han nemann john haugse linda heller health education media, inc. sharon hen nessey kent hodgetts chuck karen johnson larry jord an kartemquin/haymarket films john knoch suzan pitt kraning daina krum ins george kuchar george barbara linkevitch danny lyon cur t mcdowell gunvor nelson neill pat o'neill dennis pies josie ramstad david rimmerman kent hodgetts and joh n dubberstein kathy rose kristine samuelson greg schiffner james servais carolee schneemann anne severson penelope spheeris pamela stephan jo hn stratton chick strand john teton nadja tesich-savage susumu tokunow s ian vanderbeek rachel wohl judith wardwell carrie agins jack agins micha el anderson marie ashton scott bartlett gil beach mary beams stephen bec k bruce conner karen crommie david crommie sally cruikshank the committee nedra deen donna deitch johanna demetrakas tom dewitt r

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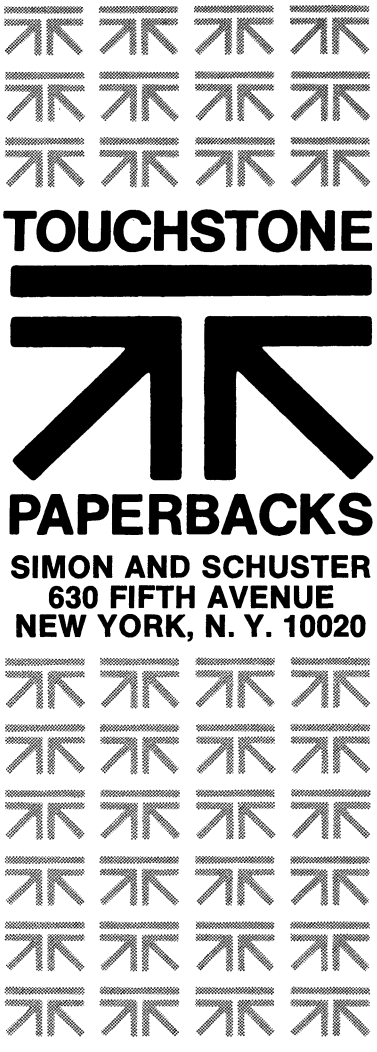

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